

DRAMA



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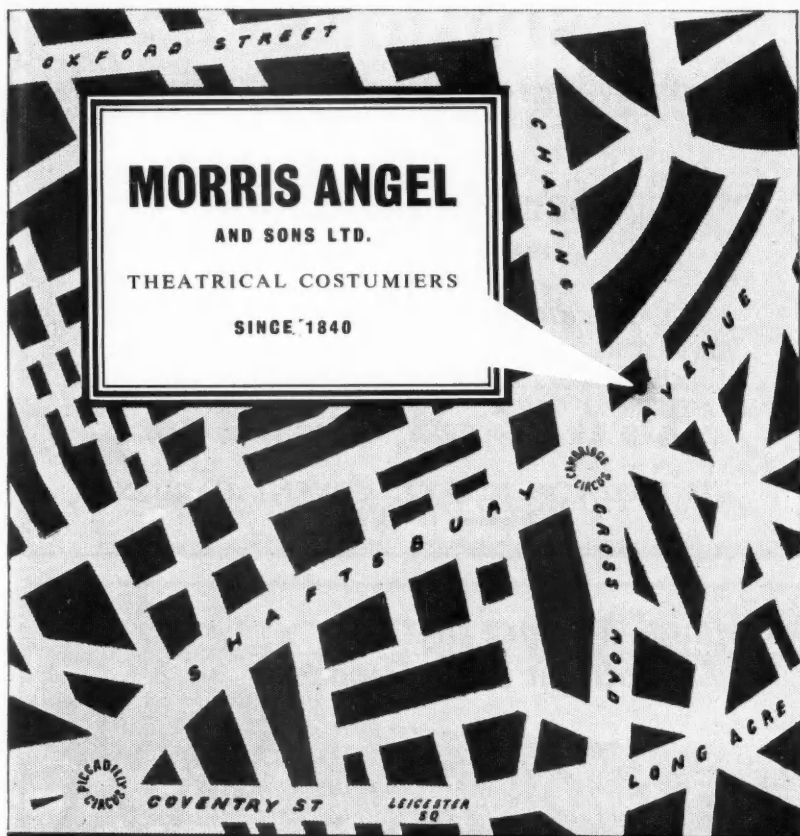
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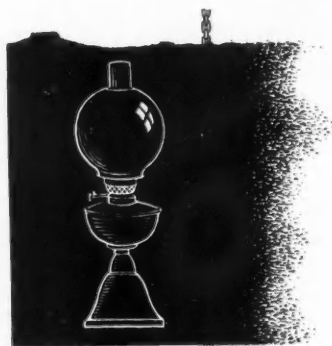
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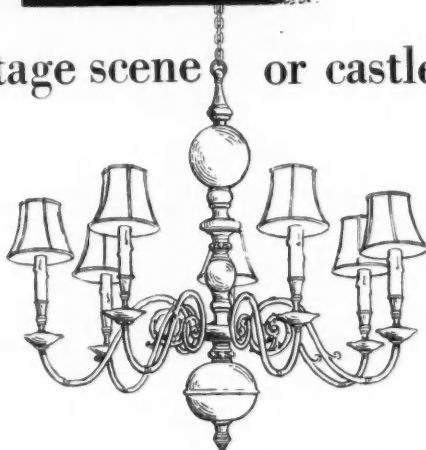
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DRAMA

The Quarterly Theatre Review

NEW SERIES

WINTER 1955

NUMBER 39

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Editor: E. Martin Browne, C.B.E. Associate Editor: Doris Hutton

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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



EDWIGE FEUILLERE in *La Dame aux Camélias* at the Duke of York's Theatre.

EDITORIAL

PLAYWRIGHTS of the first quality are the principal need of the British Theatre to-day. In the West End firmament, *Separate Tables* is the only English star which has been able to shine for a single light-year: the constellations are French or Italian or American, with *Waiting for Godot* as a Franco-Irish meteor and comets from China and Japan.

What can we do to improve our contribution? In a playwright's career there are three gaps to be bridged. He starts, let us say, with some talent and the will to work, but without experience in the theatre. Over this gap there are now a number of bridges. The British Drama League provides several: free criticism of members' manuscripts, a correspondence course (long or short), week-ends with lectures by established dramatists, seminars which have led directly to more than one professional production, and festival competitions for one-act and full-length plays produced by amateur societies. These are examples of the opportunities open to prentice playwrights.

There is no lack of prentices: but how few become master craftsmen! Recently, the League acted as host for the presentation of the Charles Henry Foyle Award, given to the author of the best new play produced by one of a selected list of Repertory and Little Theatres. This year only fifteen entries were received. Last year, none was found good enough to be rewarded. Such a verdict should make us ask whether the theatre itself is to blame. Our best producers do brilliant things with classical plays, but hardly ever seem to devote themselves to helping a contemporary author to see our own day in fresh and vivid theatrical terms.

The truth is that the climate of our theatre is dull. M. Lelarge can say, elsewhere in this issue, that the French theatre "is leading an intensely intellectual life . . ."; under whatever difficulties, it is experiencing the ferment of mind and spirit which leads to creation.

We cannot make that claim for ourselves—and it is not for lack of potential audience. From the schools, where drama now flourishes, and from those awakened by radio and television to the existence of drama, the potential, and discerning, audience for good plays is coming to the theatre's door. To satisfy this audience we need a network of theatres which produce at frequent intervals plays of quality, with a preponderance of new ones: we need, in short, a nationwide policy such as can be seen at Bristol Old Vic or Birmingham, Nottingham or Coventry. We should then be able to assure a good playwright that any new play of his would be adequately produced within a reasonable time of its being finished. And it is only when plays are quickly and regularly staged that the last gap can be bridged—the gap that leads from competence to mastery. Great playwriting is a gift of God, but the gift is never brought to perfection unless a full-blooded theatre accepts and presents it to the public for whom it was given.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

CONFESSION soothes the guilty mind, does it not? Then let me begin with one. While Edwige Feuillère was holding London in thrall, I was for the most part in a fishing-boat several miles off the coast of Cornwall. But surely I caught the first possible train back? Alas, no, I did not—and here follows an even graver confession: though I enormously admire her appearance, her voice (not, I gather, ubiquitously audible in the Duke of York's Theatre) and her mastery of gesture and timing, I have never been able to feel, much less submit to, the spell of this revered actress.

I have watched, in Paris, the superbly controlled evolution and dissolution of her Marguerite in *La Dame aux Camélias* most intently. I have observed her gaze upon her falling, fallen self (yet never less than *très grande dame*) in a mirror, distilling such pathos that the very glass seemed misted with tears—or was it merely frosted in the manner of stage looking-glasses? But the only anguish I ever felt was my own, that I remained unmoved.

So I missed that train; and, some will say, the bus. For many theatre-goers Mme Feuillère's visit has unquestionably crowned the year. And I must add, lest I seem to be prompted by vulgar patriotism, that France, ably supported by Italy and Spain, has contributed all that is best in the way of plays during the period under review.

Except, of course, for Shakespeare. Perhaps it is true that we have too much of him; yet I seldom see a revival without finding something both splendid and new: a fresh insight into an old line—I never caught Beatrice's frightful pun on "civil" and "Seville" until Peggy Ashcroft launched it with new-minted delight; or a small part

miraculously revived—never, until Dudley Jones bounced him exquisitely to life, did I feel the sense of exile, the sadness of shortness and silliness, the true comic lilt of Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. No, Sir, the man who is tired of Shakespeare is tired of life.

The Stratford company headed by Sir John Gielgud, however, insured against ennui by presenting a production of *King Lear* which, at least visually, was far from soporific. The sets of Isamu Noguchi were made up of perambulating cubes, levitating triangles, black stalactites and very suggestive bric-à-brac. The same designer's costumes varied wildly in style. High, framed foreheads imparted a vaguely oriental tinge (Mr. Noguchi is half-American by birth and wholly so by upbringing), and interest in the tragedy was obscured by goggling speculation as to what new fantasticality would follow the American footballers, spacemen, and renaissance villainesses in mad succession. And despite a regrettable programme note babbling of "the timeless, universal and mythical quality of the story," a perfectly conventional production by George Devine was lost amid these fairground counter-attractions. But perhaps this was as well, since apart from Sir John the acting was at best passable; and *Lear* himself, fighting fearful odds, was less nobly moving, more inclined to neigh in the youthful Gielgud manner, than one could have wished.

In *Much Ado* the absence of a respectable supporting cast was less severely felt; resolving itself into a dance duet between Sir John and Miss Ashcroft, the revival was enchanting throughout in Mariano Andreu's hard but sparkling sets. Nothing in the theatre could be more exhilarating than their joint capitulation in the garden, when she



"THE BURNT FLOWER-BED," by Ugo Betti, at the Arts Theatre, London. Dudy Nimmo, Alexander Knox, Leo McKern and Yvonne Mitchell. Photograph by Angus McBean.

is sent to bring him in to dinner. Benedick, pride and fire, in Sir John shows swagger melting into ardour; Beatrice, no shrew, ever, but flame and starlight, in Miss Ashcroft shows *diablerie* transmuted into peace. (This is rapture, you complain, not calm objective criticism? Well, yes, but then I was enraptured.)

The Old Vic's new season has got away to an excellent start. Michael Benthall's exciting production of *Julius Caesar*, it seems to me, has been rather underestimated. Against black backgrounds a flight of steps ("I like steps," said Gordon Craig), a vast pillar, a distant temple waxed and waned; the crowd, often no more than a mass of threatening shadow with a face here and there caught in the light, menacingly surged; the protagonists, brilliant

in white or blue or scarlet, burnt through the sombre air. John Neville's Antony held the crowd and us with melodious force, finely varied; Wendy Hiller's Portia most touchingly pleaded, in those strange, prim, yet broken and sorrowing accents of hers, for Brutus' confidence; and in the tent scene the sense that, quarrel bitterly though they may, Brutus and Cassius are indeed lifelong friends was brilliantly established—the fact spoke in every movement as they faced each other or turned away, sat or stood. Richard Wordsworth's Cassius was very fine; lean and hungry, not quite honest, yet in a way loyal—an inner torment smouldered in him. And Paul Rogers' Brutus, strained, overdriven, even doubtful of the rightness of his cause, was a fine study in dogged desperation, very

cleverly blending naturalism and stylisation. Yet in one way Mr. Rogers is not now making the most of his powers. As soon as he comes to an *animato* passage, he seems to slash at his words all too hastily: attack is one thing, blind fury quite another.

An intermittent tendency to gabble marred even his enormously enjoyable Falstaff in *The Merry Wives*, vaster, coarser, deliberately funnier than his playing in *Henry IV*, full of broad business with tankard or nightgown (in bed with his cold, he rose from the pillow within the four-poster like some inflated effigy in a Punch-and-Judy show); yet also sly, beadily watching. For the rest, this was a patchy production; Douglas Seale loaded every rift with laughs, and many were extracted. Things moved fast on a more or less Elizabethan stage; Dudley Jones's Sir Hugh I have already praised, but I could not care for Richard Wordsworth's Ford, played in the manner, all ogles and hisses, of a pantomime demon king; and Wendy Hiller and Margaret Rawlings plodded rather than rippled along.

It is time to abandon the universal man, and examine, or at least note, the offerings of our own time and country. The sweetly pretty school of British entertainment, which really was sweetly pretty—and something more—in *Salad Days*, declined into pastel-shaded whimsy in *Wild Thyme*, into rough and ready patchwork with *Twenty Minutes South*. All the straight plays—four farces, a thriller, and an historical drama—were unenterprising exercises in their respective genres. Mr. Priestley, in *Mr. Kettle and Mrs. Moon*, worked once more over the theme of Somerset Maugham's *The Breadwinner*, and in a negative way that of his own *Good Companions*: but this anecdote about the provincial bank manager who chucks it all up has nothing new to say, and may be briefly summed up as a waste of that fine actress Frances Rowe. A little more alert was *Lucky Strike*, in which Michael Brett whipped up a

fairly sprightly version of the one about the irrepressible, irresponsible *mère de famille*—who in this case disrupts not so much the lives of her family as the industrial organisation of the country: Ambrosine Philpotts played her with zest and a tall, rangy panache which recalled, though it hardly replaces, Zena Dare. In *Mrs. Willie* Alan Melville provided a vehicle, as they say, for Yvonne Arnaud, who, however, far from being carried by it had to push for all she was worth to propel it creakingly through the statutory two and a half hours. In *Home and Away* Heather McIntyre assembled every known cliché of lower-middle-class humour; Edward Chapman as Father sounded cross throughout the evening, as well he might have. In the thriller, *Dead On Nine*, Andrew Cruickshank, hunched and Caledonian, stumped through another of his able studies in relentless and sinister affability. *The Sun of York*, which set out to rehabilitate Richard III, can only be regarded as an unfortunate all-round error of judgment.

All this amounts to no more than sleepwalking, as far as the true theatre is concerned. Europe has sent us some more promising fare, and one superb theatrical experience. Theatre Workshop, for instance, has put on *The Sheep-Well* by Lope de Vega—or at least a version of it. An appalling text suggested nineteenth-century fustian hastily worked over (rather on these lines: "Nay, old man, stay thy hand. Yon villian is as tough as they come."). The acting was tepid, the production clearly weighted to throw all the emphasis on the solidarity of the workers. But the simple staging—a large, simplified map of Spain as a backcloth and two vast wedges sloping to the centre of the stage—was extremely effective; given helpful lighting, this is as much in the way of scenery as a well-written play should need (and think, as the old song says, of the money it saves).

From Italy *The Burnt Flower-Bed*, at

the Arts, marked the opening of the Ugo Betti season. It is a good, solid, sensitive, over-wordy play, an intelligent yet emotional study in private failure and public responsibility. And it was beautifully done; all concerned—not least, I presume, Peter Hall, the producer—brought to bear an interplay

quite enough. Michael Hordern, too, was a little weighty as an increasingly reluctant lover; James Hayter, though he too has been accused of excessively anglicising a husband's rather gallant absurdity and absurd gallantry, in fact was exactly right—he would have been acclaimed in Paris. Between them this



"MR. KETTLE AND MRS. MOON" at the Duchess Theatre. Beckett Bould, Raymond Francis and Richard Warner. Photograph by Wilfred Newton.

of intelligence and feeling which provided true dramatic pleasure. Alexander Knox, as a retired and inwardly self-reproachful demagogue, embraced both wit and emotion; Leo McKern, already a master of bizarre bravura parts, played a party boss with infinite resource in a vein of brooding naturalistic restraint; Esmé Percy drew with exquisite modulation of pace an old, tired, cowardly schemer.

Three plays came from France. *Nina*, a skilful boulevard comedy by André Roussin, lacked at its centre the human whirlwind required; Coral Browne was cool and beautiful, but this was not

trio spun a great deal of fun out of Roussin's resourceful variations on the theme that all men need a mother all the time.

Marcel Aymé's *The Count of Clérambard* survived the Channel crossing less well. This is a play of strong but ambiguous feeling: a man's character, M. Aymé suggests, is what it is, and remains unchanged whether he chooses to behave as a devil or a saint. The Count begins as a devil, sees St. Francis, or thinks he does—which comes to the same thing—and with equal extravagance embarks on a life of relentless sanctity. It is essential that Clérambard



"WAITING FOR GODOT" at the Criterion Theatre. Peter Bull and Timothy Bateson as Master and Slave; Hugh Burden and Peter Woodthorpe as the two tramps. Photograph by Houston Rogers.

shall seem to himself a new man, to whom something wonderful has happened. Here Clive Brook failed us; grindingly devilish in the broad French manner, he conveyed no sense of later transfiguration. And he was not well supported—save by Helen Haye, a horrified, shrugging, wide-eyed beldam, and Mai Zetterling, a prostitute once more, but displaying a range of intonation and a hip-flaunting vivacity quite new in her and very welcome.

Lastly, the storm-centre—*Waiting for Godot*. The impact of this astonishing work is tremendous, and purely theatrical. It is not, in any sense, an intellectual crossword puzzle, but rather a cry from the heart; Ibsen used to get extremely angry when people tried to

pin exact meanings on to his symbols, and Samuel Beckett would be entitled to do the same. The two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are human beings; one, unimaginative, is all for giving up the struggle; the other, clinging to some shreds of an artist's idealism, knows that one must carry on somehow. Pozzo is a sad, powerful man; Lucky, his slave, is a mad, desperate one; each is utterly dependent upon the other.

Out of this quartet's bondage and seemingly haphazard meetings Mr. Beckett spins not a series of gloomy philosophical interchanges but a crazy sampler reflecting, in positively music-hall terms of knockabout, back-chat and every conceivable sort of joke, the

large and small perplexities of life. There is nothing portentous about it all, still less any pretentiousness. *Waiting for Godot* is a tragic farce; it might well be played by Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton as the two tramps, Laurel and Hardy as Lucky and Pozzo. It was in fact beautifully played at the Arts. Paul Daneman made Vladimir, the stronger of the tramps, a rueful poet, and gave him a debased, creaking nobility and a strange radiance.*

Peter Woodthorpe gives Estragon a dreadful, and dreadfully funny, earthy yet cringing gloom; Peter Bull, inclined to hammer the rich and splendid Pozzo

* The part of Vladimir was taken over later by Hugh Burden; a shade drier, a little more petulant, his assumption loses the play a little of its warmth, but captures all its essential character.

in the ascendant, is massively touching in his decline; and Timothy Bateson brings to Lucky, and especially to his tremendous set piece—a wild, uncontrolled, stammering, shouting, whimpering, incoherent mockery of the official wisdom of the world—a marionette's helpless appeal. Once more Peter Hall is the producer: he has welded all into an impressive whole. Do not believe those who claim that *Waiting for Godot* is formless; it is written like a piece of music; themes are stated, developed, recapitulated, inverted, interwoven; Mr. Hall has seen or felt this, and has, with the help of his excellent actors, made this deeply poetic, squalid, consoling piece of true theatre into an unforgettable experience.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

By STUART BURGE

By permission of the Hornchurch Theatre Trust, Mr. Burge recently visited Germany under the auspices of the I.T.I.

TO pass judgment on the quality of acting and even of production in a foreign country is a risky business. Familiarity with the language is not enough; if one is not at home in the social environment one can make no real estimate of the truthfulness or objective accuracy of the acting of a character or incident, and one can only guess whether a certain impact on the audience has been made by foul means or by fair, by trickery or by artistry. Gründgens' performance of General Forster in *Marching Song*, for instance, struck me as mannered and built on an elaborate technical fabric of well-timed euphony and studied glances, but the Düsseldorf audience seemed satisfied that here was the behaviour of a successful general after seven years' solitary confinement. Viktor de Kowa as Gettner in *The Dark Is Light Enough* seemed to me to be giving a splendid interpretation of the part, except that

at every mention of the Hungarians he started to shiver from head to foot like a windjammer in irons. This made me want to laugh, but the effect on the Hamburg audience was quite the opposite; they clearly thought it was true of a coward's behaviour in the circumstances. It probably was—the Germans are a far more demonstrative people than we are.

Anyone who has been keeping abreast of the times might well think that acting which I assumed to be artificial or mannered was merely a manifestation of that recent trend towards an objective kind of presentation whose main inspiration and spokesman is Bertolt Brecht. "The actor is there not to 'be' the character, but to present it to the audience for criticism." But that is not what seems to be prevalent in the West German companies that I saw. Here was what I would describe as a vain kind of acting,

with the actors luxuriating in the refinements of their own technical accomplishment, which is indeed considerable. Every large town can boast a company whose physical resources are probably greater than those of an Old Vic or Stratford company. Every actor seems to be an expert in swordsmanship, and can indulge in the shouting matches that seem so popular without harming his voice. Most of the company can play on some instrument and can sing well; in fact there is often a great deal of coming and going between the town opera and drama companies, which work in conjunction. In Frankfurt I saw a remarkable production of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* for which the drama company enlisted the support of the opera department.

But in spite of their accomplishments, the staging and lighting facilities which made my mouth water, the subsidy figures which made me reel (£80,000 per year for the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus was the lowest), the efficiency of administration and the magnificence of the buildings, I remained strangely unmoved by the acting, and I would have put this down to my unfamiliarity with the German character had it not been for a most unexpected surprise when I got to Berlin.

What I had read of Brecht's own writing and what had been written about him led me to expect "coterie" theatre with a company of actors submitting, the young ones enthusiastically, the old ones with their tongues in their cheeks, to a dogmatic director who was concerned more with making fashionable his theories than with the art of the theatre. The forbidding aspect of East Berlin when one enters it for the first time (against all the good advice of one's friends in the Western Sector), the comparatively deserted streets, the banality of the propaganda banners that dangle from the ruins, the dreariness of the loudspeaker voices on street corners making pathetic attempts to rouse the apparently bored passers-by to political consciousness, the surliness

of the populace—all this filled me with misgiving as I approached the Schiffbauerdamm, the theatre where Brecht originally worked in 1926 and to which he has now returned with every facility granted to his Berliner Ensemble by the East German government.

With far less formality than I had experienced in any other German theatre, I was welcomed and taken to watch a rehearsal. The play was *The Recruiting Officer* by Farquhar, adapted by Brecht into German. I found the atmosphere congenial, the way the rehearsal was conducted admirable, and here, where I expected the director to be even more dominant than in other theatres in Germany, there was an uninhibited atmosphere and the actors did not hesitate to say what they thought. I began to look for manifestations of the Brecht theory and was rather puzzled because, apart from the highly successful incidental music played by an ensemble of harpsichord, brass and drums, the performance seemed to be developing in the best English tradition of Restoration acting. This, with its light touch and sophisticated comment, was indeed remarkable in Germany, and I soon realised that the reason Brecht had chosen to adapt this Restoration play was not only because it gives opportunities for pacifist pleading and clear indictment of the corruption that armies breed (his main preoccupation at the moment), but that the Restoration theatre is so admirably suited to his "estrangement" theory.

I may be over-simplifying if I say that this theory merely means an objective approach on the part of the actor, who makes a critical observation of the character and then mimics its behaviour for the benefit of the audience. This, on the face of it, is what happens and it is a trend which I find stimulating. The technique is not an easy one. "Critical observation" involves all the careful exploration of the character that one has been taught by Stanislavsky and his predecessors

and I am sure Brecht would be the first to acknowledge the debt due to Stanislavsky). But it is at the point where so many actors lose the way and wallow in the illusion that they have

character, what do you think?". This is a healthy antidote to too much misinterpretation of the Moscow Art influence; it encourages the actor to use his imagination and observation in



REGINA LUTZ in "Mother Courage," by Bertolt Brecht, at the Schiffbauerdamm Theater, East Berlin.

identified themselves with the character, which too often results in nobody's satisfaction but the actor's, that Brecht makes them stop short and show it to the audience, as much as to say "this is what I've discovered about this

a more selective and therefore artistic way. Above all, it is complementary to the production of Brecht's own plays which are written in an epic manner so as to expose human behaviour in certain circumstances for the critical

appraisal of his public.

My impression after a week of attending rehearsals and performances was of a company as proficient as any in Germany but somehow inspired, presumably by their remarkable director, to allow their imagination to

for whom the cook must provide a meal.

Great freedom for the actors was noticeable in their production of one of the few German classical comedies, *The Broken Jug* by Kleist. Here, invention by the actors (I don't mean of comic business but of comic and



HELENE WEIGEL and ERNST BUSCH in "Mother Courage".

dominate their performance. Take as an example the bitter yet moving comment that Helene Weigel and Ernst Busch were able to make on the comical situation in *Mother Courage* when she finds she is able to "up" the price of the chicken she is trying to sell the cook, by taking advantage of the ravenous hunger of her long lost son,

unexpected views of all sides of their characters) made the scene where the old lady describes the splendour of the design which, before the disaster, had been depicted on the face of the jug, one of the funniest I saw while I was in Germany. I believe it is this apparent independence of the actor, remarkable in Germany which is the technical

director's stronghold, together with Brecht's reputation as a dramatic poet with a common touch, which makes his company so popular; and although it is no unusual thing in Germany for the theatre to be full for the entire season, I did get the impression that the Berliner Ensemble and other East Berlin theatres under his influence attracted a wider cross-section of the public.

To put all this in its proper perspective the economics of the East German theatre should be borne in mind. While the resources of West German theatres seem tremendous in our eyes, the funds available to a theatre like Brecht's seem inexhaustible, with no restriction in the way they are spent. Last year the Berliner Ensemble added only one new production to its repertoire and although I saw the first dress rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer* in May, its first performance was not until September! Moreover, the actors' and theatre-workers' status is privileged in a Communist society. This involves priority, along with heavy workers, for housing accommodation, permission to run a car, the use of a theatre club of the dimensions of the Garrick free to all actors and technicians (and I can vouch for the quality of the food and service). Moreover, salaries are apparently very satisfactory—that is if you are resident in the East and spend your money there. Those of the Brecht company vary from an equivalent in purchasing power of £8 to £70 per week, which can be made up to about £160 a week by doing film work. Contracts are yearly or two-yearly; there are some life contracts, and all actors and technicians get five weeks' paid holiday with free holiday camps for their children. Pensions at the age of 65, at the rate of 80 per cent. of the last theatre salary, are paid whether the actor is still earning or not. I ventured to ask whether this did not make for complacency. Some admitted this, but contended that as there are still so many more actors than jobs, and because Berlin was still the Mecca to

be achieved, usually after a long period of slogging away in the provinces (there are 80 state or town theatres in East Germany) there was still the incentive of competition.

The preaching of Communist ideology seems to be mainly confined to the programme. This is full of heavy-handed guidance on the social significance of the play and quite a lot of bald propaganda. I found no evidence of political discrimination in the choice of the company and very few seemed to be in any way connected with the party. It was amusing to see a notice at one of the stage doors requesting "once more" that the actors should show some interest in and add their signatures to the Vienna Appeal. And there is no question of not paying Equity dues as these are docked out of salaries!

High artistic standards are by no means peculiar to East Berlin—I had a charming first experience of Ferdinand Raimund's work in a glossy presentation at the Kurfürstendamm in West Berlin of *Die Gefesselte Phantasie*, a satirical tale that reminded me of Gozzi's plays, and I saw a great performance by Ernst Deutsch of *Nathan der Weise* in the splendid new and hygienic-looking Schiller Theater, also in the West. On the other hand, the State Opera on the East side could only muster a quite dismal performance of Prokofiev's ballet of *Cinderella*. There is in the East, however, a quite remarkable Comic Opera and I remember Strauss's opera based on Jonson's *Silent Woman* as another red-letter night.

Despite the tragical-farcical situation of a city divided into two opposing camps, and the feeling of playing a gigantic and rather risky game of Tom Tiddler's ground, Berlin is, I suppose, the happiest hunting ground in the world for the theatre-lover. Apart from clubs, there are eight large theatres on the West side and ten on the East, most of them on a repertoire system with permanent companies. Where else can one find the best of both worlds for the price of an underground ticket?

IBSEN IN TRANSLATION

By ALLAN WADE

THE arrival of Ibsen on the English stage was slow and devious. The earliest attempt to acquaint the public with his work was made on December 15th, 1881, when an adaptation of *The Pillars of Society* by William Archer was given a single matinée at the old Gaiety Theatre under the title *Quicksands*. In 1882 a translation of *A Doll's House* by Frances Lord was published; Bernard Shaw in one of his autobiographical asides has somewhere recorded that he took the part of Krogstad in a reading of this by his Socialist friends, with Eleanor Marx playing Nora; and there seems to have been a more public performance of the play at the School of Dramatic Art on March 25th, 1885. But an adaptation called *Breaking a Butterfly* by Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman had already been played at the Prince's (Prince of Wales) Theatre in March, 1884, the adaptors providing the play with a happy ending. It was not until 1889 that London audiences were really made acquainted with Ibsen, when Janet Achurch and her husband Charles Charrington gave twenty-four performances of *A Doll's House*, in Archer's translation, at the Novelty (now Kingsway) Theatre. A revival of *The Pillars of Society* at the Opéra Comique took place in the same year.

In 1890 George Moore, who had seen performances given by André Antoine's "Théâtre Libre" in Paris, wrote enthusiastically both of the organisation and of Antoine's production of *Les Revenants*, and urged the necessity for an English Théâtre Libre; and when in 1891, encouraged by him and a few others, J. T. Grein launched the Independent Theatre with a presentation of *Ghosts*, the fat was in the fire. Conventional dramatic critics, foaming with rage, rushed from theatre to newspaper office to write frenzied

condemnation of the play. A month later two courageous American actresses, Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea, produced Ibsen's latest play, *Hedda Gabler*, with some success in spite of unfriendly notices for the work itself; and Florence Farr had already given some performances of *Rosmersholm* earlier in the year, which had come in for their share of vituperation. Archer had great fun in compiling a little anthology of abuse, which he published in a newspaper under the title "Ghosts and Gibberings." Ibsen became a cult among connoisseurs of the drama, but, with a few honourable exceptions, the critics remained recalcitrant. Even so fastidious a playgoer as Henry James succumbed to Ibsen's "charmless fascination," and his essay "On the Occasion of *Hedda Gabler*" (1891), with his notes on some of the later plays, remain unsurpassed as the most evenly balanced study of the social dramas.

Although the public could not be relied on to fill the theatre for more than some half-dozen performances at a time, other productions followed: *The Wild Duck* by the Independent Theatre, *An Enemy of the People* by Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket, and, as they appeared and were translated, Elizabeth Robins arranged performances of *The Master Builder* in 1893 and of *Little Eyolf* in 1896. When the Independent Theatre came to an end, she and William Archer, with the help of H. W. Massingham and Alfred Sutro, formed a small organisation called the New Century Theatre which presented *John Gabriel Borkman* in 1897, while it was left to the Stage Society, founded in 1899, to give Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken*, as well as the earlier *Lady Inger of Ostraat* and *The League of Youth*, and revivals of *The Pillars of Society* and *The Lady from the Sea*.

With nearly all of these productions



HENRIK IBSEN receiving Mr. William Archer in Audience. Reproduced from "The Poet's Corner" by Max Beerbohm (King Penguin Books).

the name of William Archer is inevitably associated. In 1890 he began the issue of what became a five-volume edition of all the more important dramas, and from then onwards he was Ibsen's official translator. On the face of it, this seemed an ideal arrangement. Archer was a man of great integrity; he had known Norway from his early days and was a good Norwegian scholar; he knew Ibsen personally and had won his confidence; he was widely read in dramatic literature, and, as a professional critic for many years, he was accustomed to hearing dialogue spoken on the stage. His sense of fitness made him refuse to receive any royalties from the performance of his translations; this left him a free hand to fight Ibsen's battles without incurring any accusation of self-interest. Unhappily there is another side to the picture. With everything, as one might think, in their favour, there is something about his translations which prevents them achieving that vividness so essential to dramatic speech. The language never comes quite alive. One wonders, sometimes, if the abuse so freely bestowed

on the earlier productions—"dull," "depressing," "morbid" and so forth—may not have been partly due to the deadening effect of the translations. It was, perhaps, Archer's very integrity which betrayed him. He was anxious to provide an actable text, but he was also anxious to keep as near to Ibsen's original as was humanly possible; and the two desires proved incompatible.

When in 1901 Archer brought out a new revised edition of the plays, his publishers issued a leaflet containing excerpts from his General Introduction, in which Archer faced this possibility and said he felt he had made his earlier versions too colloquial and so not near enough to Ibsen's text; with characteristic generosity he declared himself responsible for any shortcomings in his versions, while giving credit for all excellencies to those whose work he had revised, or to the plays themselves. He did not lack defenders. Bernard Shaw, whose loyalty to any friend he really cared for was almost fanatical, would not hear a word against the translations, and suggested that Archer's work should have State

recognition; Granville Barker, was another staunch admirer, though both men, as practising playwrights, must have been aware of the dialogue's shortcomings. But Sir Max Beerbohm, in an essay of "Advice to those about to translate Plays," made no secret of his opinion. The whole essay is so illuminating that one might quote passage after passage from it; a few, however, must suffice. Asking whence, in every English production of Ibsen's work, came that "sense of oppression—a toiling up-hill sense, hard to explain," he found that it came from the quality of the words spoken. "These words had many a good quality, but not that of being speakable. Mr. Archer is an admirable writer. He is always lucid. He is never otiose. His grammar is above suspicion. But his style is rather inflexible. Besides, there is a great difference between what looks well in type and what sounds well on a pair of lips, and the width of this difference Mr. Archer has yet to realize." The essay goes on to give examples, damaging examples. And after quoting a sentence which he describes as a nightmare "Max" says "Possibly it was a nightmare in Norwegian. In that case Mr. Archer should have tried to improve it. No author is infallible. There is no reason why the maker of a translation for the stage should not correct occasional lapses. A dangerous theory? But I am anxious to cure translators of their exaggerated veneration for original authors. Only so can the original authors get a chance."

The translations, either made or sponsored by Archer, remained the only ones available, and were used by Gordon Craig—possibly with some adaptation—in his famous production of *The Vikings (The Warriors at Helgeland)* for Ellen Terry, by Granville Barker in his productions of *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler* at the Court Theatre, and by Herbert Trench when he staged *The Pretenders* at the Haymarket Theatre in 1913. One member of the audience at this production remembers well how, in

spite of the fine decor and an excellent cast, the monotony of the dialogue induced a perpetual somnolence, from which he awoke from time to time with a guilty start—all the more guilty because he was sitting next to the translator himself.

But by degrees new translations appeared. Versions of most of the earlier plays were made by R. Farquharson Sharp and published in the Everyman Library. They certainly came more trippingly off the tongue than Archer's, and began to find their way into the theatre. An excellent production of Sharp's version of *The Wild Duck* at the Everyman Theatre in 1926 moved on to the St. James's. Ibsen, at long last, was taking his place as a classic rather than as an exotic. During and since the Second World War his plays have been more and more in evidence. In 1944 Mr. Norman Ginsbury's brisk and spirited version of *Peer Gynt* was played by the Old Vic company and found to be excellent entertainment, although the fact that it had been written as a dramatic poem was more or less—and, one gathers, intentionally—concealed.

Some two years ago Miss Eva Le Gallienne gave us a new and admirable translation of *Hedda Gabler*, with a preface which showed a deep understanding of the play, especially from the director's standpoint. Now, in a companion volume, Miss Le Gallienne has given us an equally fine rendering of *The Master Builder* (Faber & Faber, 18s.), a more difficult play but one which she has often directed and in which she has appeared many times. Only once, in this version, has her literary tact failed her; she allows Solness to use the vulgarity "Let's get it over with"—to which the English reader instinctively asks "with what?". She has, however, evidently studied the original text with sympathetic understanding, and frankly admits that, in the last long scene between Hilda and Solness "no translation can hope to capture even remotely the poetry of the original." It is to be hoped she will continue her good work:

Rosmersholm and the three last plays will offer a wide scope for her keenly perceptive analysis.

Two recent London productions, in versions provided by Mr. Max Faber, have had great and well deserved success. If *The Wild Duck* owed this partly to the fact that several of the players were widely known for their work in the cinema, nothing but the sheer brilliance of the acting and the flowing ease of the translation made

Hedda Gabler perhaps the most memorable of any Ibsen production in our time. And when, after the play's long run in London, Miss Peggy Ashcroft and her companions stood on the stage to receive the enthusiastic applause of the citizens of Oslo, surely the ghost of William Archer—if rationalists can have ghosts—was near them to add his silent approbation of what was, at least indirectly, the triumph of his long labours in the Ibsen cause.

DONNING THE PURPLE

By PETER FORSTER

THE fate, fortunes, position, prospects and desirability of actor-managers in the theatre have been a topic for discussion "since Roscius was an actor in Rome" and Polonius at his university—and seldom more pertinently than now, when the actuary is in ascendance over the artist, and there are no signs of the Tennents ever being evicted. Is the distinction unfair? I think not: Mr. Beaumont has undeniably shrewd judgment and taste, and there is no reason why he should be expected to act as well as plan. Many consider that to be the best arrangement, the artist concentrating on his art, the manager on management. The special relevance of the actor-manager to this question is that his status epitomises both pros and cons to the argument, for in him we see what may happen when artist and manager merge into a single being.

Two books this year have thrown light on the actor-manager's position to-day and a hundred years ago; they are *Mr. Macready* (Harrap, 18s.), by J. C. Trewin, and *First Interval* (Odhams, 16s.), the autobiography of Donald Wolfitt. Not, one hastens to add, that there is a similarity of character and temperament between these two notable actors. Macready was born of an old theatrical family; Wolfitt's

nativity was innocent of grease paint. Macready never wanted to be an actor; Wolfitt has never wanted to be anything else. Macready retired from the stage and lived twenty-two years more; it is unlikely that Wolfitt will follow the same pattern. But both are known as actor-managers of considerable stature, both devoted to the cause of Shakespeare, and both eminently responsible men.

And I am bound to note that in a comparison between the two—so far as their work and influence in the theatre is concerned, rather than their individual histrionic talent—the balance is distinctly to the credit of Mr. Wolfitt, and permits us to feel that in a hundred years certain matters have improved. Macready became an actor because his father's debts left him little alternative, and the atmosphere of the profession in his day was appallingly selfish, low-minded and uncondusive to any really artistic enterprise. Macready is often chided for disliking the profession he adorned; in fact it has always seemed to me amazing that a high-minded man of some sensitivity should have put up at all with the quarrels, the insults, the public brawls and coterie intrigues, to say nothing of the savage professional rivalries of his day. The theatre then was fit only for barnstormers, and for genius such as Kean's.

Mr. Wolfit, by contrast, turned actor-manager because he "was seized by the overwhelming desire to undertake at least one tour of the plays of Shakespeare under my own management," and because he felt "there were larger audiences (for Shakespeare) than could be contained at Stratford, the Old Vic, and Regent's Park." His aim was to start "a crusade to persuade the theatregoing public that the works of our national dramatist were not pap for schoolchildren, research material for scholars, and highbrow entertainment for the esoteric few, but the greatest entertainment and recreation in our own or any other language." Not all actor-managers have been as high-minded as that.

One is not suggesting that Mr. Wolfit first introduced Shakespeare to the English (though it is to his eternal credit that he has performed the introduction with more zeal in more places than any actor with the possible exception of Benson), nor that his career has been free from professional difficulties and turbulent moments. But his book shows an absolute devotion to his chosen dramatist and to the dignity of the player's profession which is admirable and moving. It is not particularly well written, being composed rather in the manner of Mr. Wolfit's curtain speeches. No matter: his spirits shine through him. "I hear you're going to don the purple," said Randle Ayrton, "which is what we used to call going into management in the good old days!" Mr. Wolfit has worn the purple nobly.

Mr. Trewin's book is intensely readable and useful (it is the first full-length biography for sixty years), as evidence of the actor-manager's virtues. I do not think Macready comes out of it particularly well. "Thine is it that our drama did not die," thundered Tennyson in his famous tribute at the actor's retirement. But what drama did he cause to live? Shakespeare certainly, but what new plays? Granted that dramaturgy was in its doldrums during

his heyday, there is still rather a give-away in the appended list of Macready's non-Shakespearean parts. His most notable "moderns" were Bulwer and Sheridan Knowles: they did not long outlive their saviour. Even those attempts to raise the player's standing seem to me more the work of the tormented lay-brother than the inspiration of a genuine artist. As producer, designer, aider-and-abettor of new talent, Macready counted for little. He was content to concentrate upon the integrity of his own performance.

Though Mr. Wolfit is less culpable in this respect, having profited by technical inventions and ideas unknown to Macready, yet he is open to some similar reproaches. It has long been charged against him that he seldom surrounds himself with a company worthy of his own talent, and although he indignantly rebuts this, the proof of the pudding is surely in our (the audience's) eating? And that being the case, who can wonder if he sometimes falls into the old actor-manager's trick of making the part, his part, seem greater than the whole?

Yet by and large modern actor-managers have played a most honourable part in theatrical enterprise. Early this summer a certain national newspaper carried an attack on Sir Laurence Olivier which might have made a lesser man throw up his hands in despair. Especially he was reproached for managerial failures and lack of enterprise. Yet it was Sir Laurence who, before he gave up management, brought to this country *The Consul* and Jean Anouilh; who allowed us to see Barrault and the divine Feuillère on the stage; who commissioned and produced new plays by Fry and Cannan! He may have lost money, but this is not a record of failure and lack of enterprise.

Moreover, before writing the actor-manager off as a moribund institution, consider whether the present cartel system entirely supplies his deficiencies. Does the manager see the part any

more "whole" than the actor-manager? May he not rather be more obsessed with solely box-office and commercial considerations in casting? And surely an immense advantage of the actor-

reader, lie not in our stars. Genius is the imponderable factor in the arts, and at the moment we have at least two actors with a touch of that precious commodity, and several more with the



MR. MACREADY AS KING LEAR
(from the Mander and Mitchenson Collection)

manager system is that one man controls one theatre and its policy, thus preventing anything like an overall monopoly.

All of which is not to suggest that the present state of the theatre can be resolved by trying to set up numerous actor-managements. But the faults, dear

highest talent. Playwrights apart, what we happen to need now is a manager of genius, for we have had none since Cochran died. I know that Cochran lost money on many of his ventures, but if he declined to look at art solely from the standpoint of a box-office pay-clerk, who is a mere critic to gainsay him?

THE ACTOR'S TASK IN INTERPRETING SHAKESPEARE

By RONALD WATKINS

*This article, printed here for the first time in England,
originally appeared in the "Shakespeare-Jahrbuch"*

THE design and equipment of the Elizabethan playhouse and the Elizabethan staging of plays have been discussed with increasing frequency and ever more widespread interest in late years, and the findings of the scholars have received some measure of recognition in the private or amateur theatres of to-day. But the changes in current professional productions of Shakespeare, in England and elsewhere, represent only a superficial concession to the development of public opinion and taste: there is still no sign of the radical revolution in methods of producing and acting which is to be expected from a study and adoption of the practice of the Elizabethan theatre. Meanwhile there is a danger lest the necessarily inconclusive controversies over details of architecture and playhouse custom should obscure the important issue of the fundamental difference in method between the Elizabethan theatre and our own, and the ensuing implication that to appreciate Shakespeare's plays to the full we must do our best to revive the conditions in which they were first presented.

This fundamental difference can be simply stated. The Elizabethan playhouse depended upon the creative power of the spoken word. Our theatre of to-day does not—or if it does, only incidentally. Since the coming of the cinema, the difference of emphasis is still more strongly marked. The theatre of the Greeks, with its traditional austerity of setting on the hill-side, bred poetic drama of universal theme and cosmic expression. The Elizabethan

playhouse likewise bred poetic drama, but its greater intimacy, due to its confinement within a "Wooden O", could house the particular as well as the universal, the domestic no less than the cosmic. What was common to both Greek and Elizabethan, and what is lacking in the theatre of to-day, was a permanent, familiar setting for the speech and action of the players. Though we cannot now be certain of their form, to the Londoner of 1600 the features of the Platform and Tiring-House at the Globe were so familiar that they could be ignored at the will of the dramatist, or used by him for the setting of some episode in his drama. It was the spoken word that controlled what Shakespeare's audience saw: the words contained and created the drama. And this is why to many of his devotees Shakespeare seems complete and satisfying within the pages of a book.

But it should not be so—any more than that the symphonies of Beethoven should seem complete on the printed score. In the conditions of the Elizabethan playhouse, the poetic drama can come to its fullest life. There the virtuoso player, with his trained voice and expert gesture and miming, presents to us the rich texture of Shakespeare's score. Of Wagner's interpreters we expect an assured technique based on strenuous practice and rehearsal, we expect nuance and phrasing, we look for musical understanding, for collaboration in duet and ensemble, for agreement with the conductor: we hope for the most eloquent and faithful interpretation of the music. These are

the first demands of the operatic critic: the rest is secondary—costume, make-up, decor, even characterisation, in the habitually limited sense of character-acting. But unfortunately no such demands are made of Shakespeare's interpreters. No particular interest is shown in the phrasing of a new actor as he tackles Hamlet. The calculation of tempo, as Macbeth and his Lady speak their scene after Duncan's murder; the rhetorical coloratura of Romeo's first act; the tone-colour of Lear's voice in his last scene, with its initial clamour of wailing and the subsequent sustained stillness shot with flickering echoes of the old turbulence—these considerations do not urgently occupy our critics. Instead we hear of some novelty of characterisation, a mannerism, a subtlety of make-up, some ingenious trick of stage machinery, of the latest (often anachronistic) decor, the stylised settings and the period costumes, the well-drilled dances and extraneous business. A leading London critic wrote not long ago of *The Tempest* at the Old Vic that it was produced "with an exciting visual imagination, a keen sense of comedy, and here and there a glimpse of poetry. If this seems a back-handed tribute," he continued, "I add that this *Tempest* is, on the whole, the most satisfying I have seen". The same point of view seems to underlie the policy of most managements that undertake to produce Shakespeare. You choose as your producer a master of grouping, of handling crowds, of lighting-effects, of inventive business, a choreographer perhaps, or someone who can impose a new style upon a well-worn text. You then look round for a stage-designer who will create startlingly imaginative pictures as variations upon the familiar theme, a dress-designer who will likewise delight the eye with a distractingly original wardrobe. Last, you will commission a composer to provide music such as will suggest a general atmosphere, and will furnish one more distraction from the main issue—the

interpretation of Shakespeare's poetical score. But when it comes to this main issue, the speech seems too often to have been left to the discretion of the actors—who too often show by their perfunctory utterance that they do not deserve the trust. This is often true of the principals no less than the supporting players. The failure of so many star performances of Shakespeare is a vocal one, and the inference is that the principal roles are miscast. It is in line with the modern tendency—stemming from the cinema—of insisting on photogenic quality above all else. But after all we do not choose our operatic stars for their looks; we prize the quality and use of their voices first.

In truth the visual imagination has little to do with the interpretation of Shakespeare's poetic drama, unless by the phrase we understand the exercise of the mind's eye. The task of the Shakespearean actor is to animate, to bring to life, to communicate to his audience the substance of the words of Shakespeare's text. These contain within themselves the drama, and so rich is this substance that it is seldom to be confined within the four walls of a room, or the three walls of the picture stage. Hamlet ranging in soliloquy over the ills of this present life, or Macbeth shuddering over the darkened hemisphere, evokes half a dozen pictures in as many lines. To communicate Shakespeare's effect the actor must make these seen by the audience—not indeed with the natural vision but with the mind's eye. This is much easier to achieve in the Elizabethan playhouse, where the actor stands on the great platform in close and intimate contact with his audience. The distinction becomes sharply clear when we consider the problem which inevitably puzzles the would-be film-makers of Shakespeare. "To be or not to be . . ." We are shown Hamlet's sea of troubles from the top of a tower and must be content with that. If we were to aim at photographing the whole series of images contained in this one soliloquy

the camera could not work fast enough, or the sound track would be so much slowed up that the tragedy would never reach its end. In *Julius Caesar* the director, most conscientiously sticking to the text, is bothered to know what to do while Cassius is persuading Brutus to join the conspiracy. It is a long dialogue, charged with poetic drama, but the cameraman is kicking his heels. "Once upon a raw and gusty day," says Cassius, "the troubled Tiber chafing with her shores . . ." and we are shown some interesting architectural vistas of a reconstructed Rome. We should surely be watching (with the mind's eye) a scene of Cassius and Caesar buffeting the roaring torrent of the river with lusty sinews, and hearing Caesar cry "help me, Cassius, or I sink." Instead, we sense the boredom of the cameraman, who fidgets like an inattentive schoolboy when the speeches are too protracted. The real moving picture of the race in the swollen Tiber would take too long, and would add greatly to the expense of the film. But in fact the boredom of the cameraman is a symbol of the whole dilemma: and the conclusion is that you cannot photograph poetic drama, whose appeal is not mainly through the eye, but for the most part through the mind's eye, as prompted by the words, the movements and the gestures of the actors.

The Film Critic of *The Times* judged that the film of *Julius Caesar* "succeeded for the awkward and paradoxical reason that it was faithful not only to Shakespeare the poet, but also to Shakespeare the playwright, and subdued the resources of the cinematic medium to the task of faithfully reproducing the dramatic pattern of his plot." The film does indeed succeed much better than any previous film of Shakespeare, because it shows a much greater respect for the text: there are comparatively few cuts, no tricks of altering the order of scenes or inserting speeches from other plays, only here and there an unhappy distorting omission—such as Portia's little panic with Lucius,

the lynching of the poet Cinna (climax of the crowd's role), the jiggling poet-aster, the comparison of the setting sun to the dying Cassius' blood. But though so much of the text is included, this is not to say that justice is done to it or that it is given pride of emphasis in the unravelling of the story. *Faithfully reproducing the dramatic pattern of his plot. . .* What is this plot? Wherein does Shakespeare's dramatic pattern lie? Not simply, I think, in the plot as we normally understand the word—the succession of episodes that mark the development of a story. It is rather in the substance of the text, its constantly shifting subject-matter—narrative, description, metaphor, characterisation, philosophical speculation, emotional interaction, wit, rhetoric, word-play, irony. And these touch the mind and heart of his audience through their ears for the most part, far more certainly than through the eye. And so rich is the substance of the text, so swiftly moving the kaleidoscope before the mind's eye, that the camera must inevitably be left halting. Now in the Elizabethan playhouse, where the problem of satisfying the eye is only of secondary importance, is indeed important only in so far as it can reinforce and illustrate and suggest the mood or atmosphere or setting of the spoken dialogue, the task of bringing home the drama to the audience lies almost wholly with the actor—and particularly with his voice, his gesture and his suggestive movement. There is much more scope for the actor in the Elizabethan medium than in to-day's conditions, and much more is needed of him.

What sort of accomplishment should we in fact expect from the interpreter of one of Shakespeare's great roles? He must have something of the singer in his art, something of the dancer, his miming must rival Ruth Draper, and beyond this, if he is to be of the greatest, he must have the poetical understanding to convey each turn of Shakespeare's kaleidoscopic imagery to

the alert consciousness of his audience. How one longs to hear and see a great rendering of Macbeth; to read in next morning's paper the descriptive record of a twentieth-century Elia. "The moment when Macbeth catches sight of the air-drawn dagger is most happily calculated by Mr. Burbage. The servant is dismissed with the laconic message to Lady Macbeth, and the player advances to the very front of the great Platform. Turning to assure himself that the boy has gone, he is confronted with his hallucination, which first puzzles, then excites him. His tone is confident. It is with a show of eagerness that he pounces to clutch the dagger. The direction of his hand fixes the dagger's position for the sequel: his eager movement takes him past this point, and he wheels round in bewilderment, so that we suddenly see his face, transfigured with dismay. . . . But the miming of this hallucination is within the compass of many actors of the part, past and present. It is in the visionary expansion of the sequel that Mr. Burbage shows his genius:

*Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings; and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy
pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his
design
Moves like a ghost.*

The eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, comprehends the hemisphere, the voice, darkening after the bright shrillness of panic, drops a tone on the word 'dead'. We are made to see unmistakably the curtained sleep of Duncan at this moment shut up in measureless content, and we feel the sinister echo of Banquo's wicked dreams—the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose. The kaleidoscope turns, and presents us with the baleful ritual of the weird sisters. Then unforgettably the actor impersonates withered murder, hears the wolf's alarum—the howl on Mr. Burbage's lips is a howl indeed to

curdle the blood—and moves with stealthy pace towards the staircase in the Study. We are even given a glimpse of that other nocturnal prowler, on his way to the chamber of Lucrece." Thus far Elia—about a performance that still waits to be given. But these are the pictures we want to see in that moment of suspended animation while the murderer is waiting for the invitation of the bell, his wife's pre-arranged signal, and the actor who with his voice and gesture can make us listen and see and feel them is the man who should lead a new revival in the interpretation of Shakespeare.

Even the crux of *King Lear* is, I am convinced, soluble by such methods. Time and again the storm-scenes of the third act prove to be the rock on which a production founders. They are moreover the core of Lamb's contention that the play cannot be acted. But it seems unreasonable to suppose that on this one occasion Shakespeare's assured technical mastery deserted him, and that he wrote at the heart of perhaps his greatest play a sequence that was unplayable. Set the act in Shakespeare's playhouse, with the bare day-lit platform jutting into the midst of the audience, with the familiar background and features of the tiring-house—so familiar that they can be ignored or used for hovel and barn and tree—and train the five actors as you would train operatic singers and ballet-dancers to interpret the drama of Shakespeare's poetic text; and you will have the most wonderful experience of sustained tragedy that the theatre can offer. The sturdy Kent, the frail Fool, Edgar with his macabre mumming and the poignant undertones of sincerity, the distraught and doddering Gloucester, and the monumental Lear—this quintet matched in a well calculated variety of voices, will not let us stray for an instant from the intensity of Shakespeare's vision: we shall see the storm and hear the emotional overtones of the storm embodied in the five who are out in it, not to mention the

*Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm*

of whom the old King has taken too little care in the selfish days of his pomp. But what is the substance of this great third act? What will the ideal interpretation be concerned with? Not surely the task of faithfully reproducing the dramatic pattern of the plot. Nothing happens in this act that would fill a page of a detective story of to-day. Nothing happens; but the mind and heart of the audience will range over the whole gamut of thought and feeling. But we must be made to *see* with the mind's eye the drenching of the steeples, the weather-cocks drowned, the thunder striking flat the thick rotundity of the world; and we must feel no less vividly the comfort of "this straw" when Lear's necessity makes vile things precious. We must know the helpless panic of the

man caught between two dangers:

*Thou'dst shun a bear;
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,
Thou'dst meet the bear i' the mouth.*

The bear must be there, and the sea on the other side. Ruth Draper could do this, or Charlie Chaplin, who evokes the image of a pansy by spreading his hands beneath his chin and by the smiling expression of his face.

Given such a method of approach, and a group of actors who studied to interpret the detail of the poetical score by voice and gesture and expression and mime, we should have, in active performance, the ultimate thrill of which Dryden speaks, though he is perhaps already thinking of Shakespeare on the printed page: "When he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too."

MODERN ART AND THE ACTOR

By WARREN LAMB

THE Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company's production of *King Lear*, with decor and costumes designed by Isamu Noguchi, has set people wondering whether the theatre must face up more daringly to the challenge of modern art. It cannot help but do so to a certain extent and Robert Colquhoun's design for the 1954 production of *Lear* at Stratford is only one illustration of the use of modern terms in a way that can be generally accepted. Noguchi's design does not appear to be so generally accepted. Is that his fault?

The producer (George Devine) and leading actor (John Gielgud) associate themselves with Noguchi in a programme note stressing the simplicity for which they have aimed and there is no doubt that they were united in a common understanding of their purpose. Noguchi's execution of the designs has clearly achieved that purpose and

he is criticised not for having failed, but for not giving production and acting a chance. This might not be entirely his fault. If producer and actors had been able to carry out their part of the venture more successfully—if they had had their fingers as much on the modern pulse as the designer—this presentation of *King Lear* might have been the most significant of the century.

It is interesting to know that Noguchi has designed for the American modern dancer Martha Graham. There is much in her dancing which may not appeal to "balletomanes" although she is greatly respected in New York by all the schools of dancing, and whether or not her influence increases or decreases there is no doubt that she is, in her individual way, a representative of the great surge of activity which followed Isadora Duncan's freeing of the dance from the conventions which were restricting its development.



JOHN GIELGUD with Anthony Nichols and Claire Bloom in "King Lear" at the Palace Theatre. Photograph: Patrician Pictures.

Isadora Duncan's revolutionary impact on the dance can be likened to that of Garrick's on the drama. When Garrick played *Richard III* in 1743 his contemporaries remarked, "If that young man is right then we are all wrong." Followers of the classical ballet might well have made a similar remark of Isadora Duncan in 1905 but the different position of the dance, in that it has no timeless masterpieces which must be re-produced to keep up with the age, but rather works of a standard which the aim is to preserve, meant that classical ballet could gain more than lose by having modern ballet

distinct from it. This separation was at its widest in the days of the Diaghileff company but the two streams have since come closer together. The drama is in a different position. Once *King Lear* is produced penetratingly true to the age then all earlier productions become museum pieces.

There is a remarkable similarity between the nature of the revolutions effected by Garrick and Duncan. There is evidence to show that Betterton in the previous century and the eighteenth century actors who performed, for example, the plays of Congreve and Vanbrugh, used postures and gestures

very similar to those which are the basis of classical ballet. Garrick liberated the drama from the same movements from which Duncan, more than 150 years later, liberated the dance. In this respect the dance was that much behind but, having enjoyed a more recent liberation, it is possible that the work of Martha Graham and her contemporaries in the dance may be more true to the modern age than is the production of drama, despite all the experiments in theatre forms of the last twenty years.

Isamu Noguchi's designs show that the drama cannot afford (if it wants to use designs such as his) to neglect the shape and rhythm of contemporary posture and gesture. There are probably writers more sensitive to these needs than there are actors. The production of this new *King Lear* fails because the acting does not match the "simple" purpose stated in the programme note. Gielgud cannot help but be compelling, but his performance is an agitated one which makes Lear more than ever a complicated figure. Most of the other players act well, according to the high standards their leader promotes, but the performances do not fit the costumes, whilst the costumes and designs do fit the conception.

The time is ripe for a new Garrick and it is disappointing that Sir John Gielgud, who could well fill this role, has not succeeded with this Lear. As to the acting standards generally, the fault may lie partly in those Schools of Acting which are slow in keeping up to date. Many still teach the students ballet and are therefore pre-Garrick! It is surely possible to teach a more up-to-date understanding of the shapes and rhythms of contemporary postures and gestures.

Modern art is a purely relative term and the conception of what is modern art, modern ballet or modern drama varies from day to day. The value of the conception becomes apparent when we see an undeniably good modern decor related to acting which is disappointingly inappropriate.

CORRESPONDENCE

Theatre in Australia

Sir,

May I, as an Englishman at present living in Australia, be allowed a word?

While in Melbourne recently, I saw two productions of the Old Vic Company headed by Robert Helpmann and Katharine Hepburn which Miss Tildesley mentions: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Measure for Measure*. I must confess that they appalled me. I felt ashamed that my own country was sending out such work publicised as the peak of Shakespearean production.

Their sole purpose seemed to be to display the cleverness and "originality" of producer and set-designer. Shakespeare almost disappeared under a clutter of tricks and business. One of the leading players had not learnt the fundamentals of verse-speaking. Another had an incredibly narrow vocal range—which is like inviting a town-hall singer to appear at Covent Garden. Words were often grossly misstressed as if actor and producer had not understood even the bare meaning of the lines. There were some redeeming performances, but on the whole the plays could not be regarded as achievements to be labelled FOR EXPORT.

If the organisers imagine that "anything will do for Australia" they are greatly mistaken. The standard of amateur drama here is extremely high—I should say higher than in towns of equivalent size in England. On my third evening in Melbourne I saw an admirable production of Saroyan's *Time of Your Life* by a semi-professional company at the Union Theatre in the University. This, to me, was a genuine production. The director first of all made sure that he had caught the spirit of the play and the dramatist's intention; then he threw all his resources into interpreting them. It is a pity that so many Shakespearean producers these days decline to do the same.

CLIVE SANSOM

31 Gordon Avenue,
Lenah Valley,
Hobart, Tasmania.

Kean's Wig

Sir,

I should like to point out a mis-statement in John Allen's review of *Kean* by Jean-Paul Sartre on page 43 Autumn issue of *DRAMA* where he refers to Kean appearing as Shylock in a red wig. Red was, of course, the traditional colour from the time of Burbage onwards; witness his epitaph:—

"The red-haired Jew

That sought the bankrupt merchant's pound
of flesh."

Kean's innovation was to play in a black wig, which he did on January 26th, 1814, at Drury Lane.

GILBERT BENNETT

84 Eversley Road,
Sketty, Swansea.

REHOUSING THE QUESTORS

By JOHN ALLEN

THERE is a gay and enterprising spirit abroad in Ealing where the Questors have started work on their new theatre. They set about the project in the most intelligent possible manner, inviting a group of people which included Tyrone Guthrie, Bernard Miles, George Devine, Martin Browne and Michel St. Denis, to answer a series of questionnaires that ranged from the nature of theatrical illusion to the ideal size of auditoriums. The experts erupted, I am told, fitfully, but when the mood was on them with considerable abandon. There was a good deal of discussion, of course, about the relative advantages of proscenium-, fore-, apron-, arena-, and open-stages, largely prompted by the fact that the Questors have shown a deep interest in audience-actor relationship since their production of *A Doll's House* in 1945. The outcome was a proposal by the Questors to their ingenious architects, W. S. Hattrell and Partners, to design a theatre that should combine the lot! This brilliant feat is simply set out in an admirably produced brochure, graced with a charming cover designed by Osbert Lancaster. (Obtainable from the Questors Theatre, Mattock Lane, Ealing, London, W.5.)

The first point to be appreciated is the skilful adaptation of existing premises, notably a large house and a small theatre—totally inadequate for any true theatrical quest—standing in half an acre of land and all set about with splendid trees. The house is to be adapted to include foyer, cloakrooms, bar, offices, club room and manager's flat. Thus the audience will pass through the existing but reconstructed house and into the new theatre, the outside shape of which is round. Behind and beside the theatre there are to be dressing rooms and a green room surmounted by a wardrobe; a rehearsal room large enough to take a full stage set; lavatories and an assembly room, each building divided from its neighbour by a fire-break.

And now for the theatre. First of all it can be used as an orthodox proscenium theatre with a stage 77 feet by 25 feet with a normal proscenium opening of 24 feet and a seating capacity of 340. There is one circle and above it a lighting gallery which runs right round the stage and auditorium and also across the proscenium-bridge.

The auditorium is roughly the classic horse-shoe in shape.

By removing a few stall seats a small fore-stage is available. By removing still more stalls the fore-stage can be extended until eventually it becomes an open-stage extending 22 feet from the proscenium line and with the audience on three sides. The seating is actually increased to 354 as with improved sight lines additional seats can be installed on each side of the proscenium. The floor of the extended stage, built in sections, can be almost infinitely varied in height and arrangement.

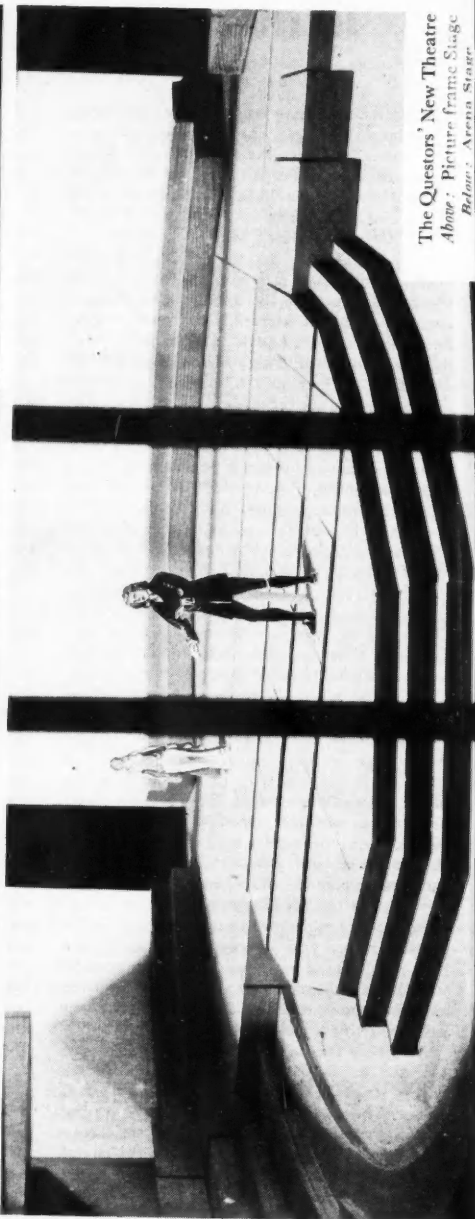
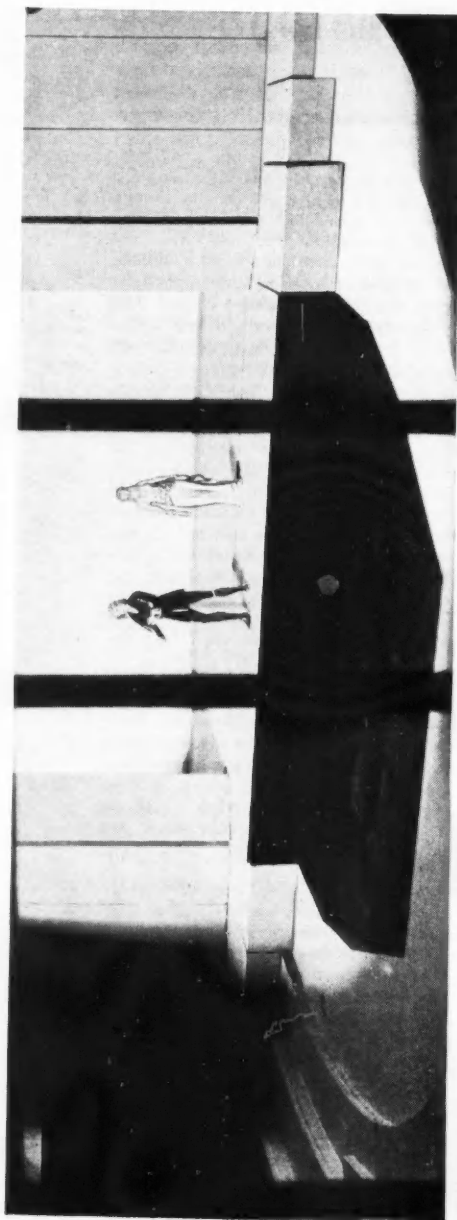
The proscenium arch, or picture frame, which is 20 feet high, is constructed of 3-ft. screens running in a track, so that it may be varied in width, or entirely removed against the side walls. There is then provision for three rows of seats extending from the auditorium and running right round the back of the stage-space and against the cyclorama (which can be extended to form a semi-circle for space-stage or a background for an arena-stage).

The scheme is devised to be realised in instalments as the money is raised. For instance, the assembly room and lavatories will be built first because they can be of immediate value to the present theatre, improving its facilities and, in the case of the assembly room, earning its own revenue. The existing theatre abuts on to the site of the new theatre only in one corner. Thus productions can continue in one theatre while the new one rises alongside it. The architect reckons that no more than a few months should be necessary finally to transfer from one theatre to the other.

The money is being raised from the normal takings of the theatre, special events and attractions, and donations, with special emphasis on the seven-year covenant. As much of the work as possible is to be done by the theatre's own members. Since Marius Goring cut the first turf in June, some enthusiastic digging has taken place. At the moment the Questors honour a good bricklayer as much as a potential Hamlet.

Anyone visiting the Questors to inspect the model and plans cannot fail to be impressed by the thoughtful manner in which the whole project has been evolved, and is now being realised. For some years Mattock Lane, Ealing, should be a centre of theatrical pilgrimage.

The Questors' New Theatre
Above: Picture frame stage
Below: Arena stage



TWO THEATRE ASSEMBLIES

THE FRENCH THEATRE TO-DAY

By HENRI LELARGE

An address delivered at the British Drama League's Theatre Week, London, September, 1955.

TO speak about the modern French theatre is much more difficult for me than I first thought. When I speak in France I give only my own personal opinion, but in England my opinion gains an official aspect with much more responsibility. I may speak too bluntly just when I should like to use all the varying shades of expression. Neither is it easy to compare the French and English theatre. I don't mean that any question of national pride will come between us: we can be proud together that our two nations are the only ones in the occidental world to have had a continuous flow of good playwrights for more than four hundred years.

We in France can certainly be proud of our dramatists. F. Bruckner said in an interview recently: "No country in the world can match Giraudoux, Anouilh and Camus. Here" (meaning Berlin) "we rate them much higher than Sartre." Yet I think that just now there is an uneasiness in our leading playwrights and perhaps we are at the beginning of a change between the generations. Look at the names of our best known ones. Claudel is dead. He was very old and it was a long time since he had written anything new, anything creative, for the theatre, even though some of his works were first put on the stage in his last years. He left behind him many papers but, to my knowledge, no posthumous play. Giraudoux is dead. His theatre is still living, and the revival of *Siegfried* and *Intermezzo*, and the success of *Tiger at the Gates*, are a proof of the strength of his work. His last, posthumous, piece was played last year by Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud.

Now let us consider the living authors. Montherlant had an overwhelming triumph this year. The biggest success of his theatrical career was undoubtedly *Port Royal*. Montherlant said emphatically, and a little too loudly for my taste, that *Port Royal* was his last work for the stage, and his *Théâtre Complet* was published this year. I hope that he will come back again presently. He is our best stylist and his French is marvellous, though perhaps a little too rhetorical for English taste. It is a pleasure to hear the music of his sentences and it is quite easy to memorise them.

But the most puzzling of our dramatists are Anouilh and Salacrou. Salacrou puts his duties as a playwright very high, and writes

only when he has something to say. This is easy because he does not have to earn his living. He is deeply concerned with the religious problem—he was born Catholic but has lost faith. He does not believe in human perfection, and he is tormented by doubts as to whether a divine perfection exists. You don't fully understand Salacrou if you don't see the metaphysical aspect of his work. A critic said that he is always longing for a paradise lost. But Salacrou has said what he had to say about this quest. He is haunted by what he calls "the mortality of the drama." After the success of *Une Femme Libre* he wrote: "Think of the fifteen new plays that have been acted every year in Paris for three centuries. Dramatic literature is an immense deserted cemetery. Make an anthology of French poetry and from generation to generation, from age to age, poets speak to us still. From Rutebeuf to Reverdy, the poets stand in an unbroken line; but with their tragedies, dramatists are solitary giants in the empty centuries."

Anouilh is still working and soon a new work, *Ornifle*, will be played by Brasseur in Paris. But let us be frank. I admire Jean Anouilh; he is certainly the dramatist with the best sense of the stage. His first plays were often badly constructed and badly written, but they had a grip over the audience. There seemed to be a necessity inside him to write them. Now Anouilh is master of his trade; the newer plays are built and written by a virtuoso, but they lack this virtue of necessity. Perhaps he had nothing more to say and so uses his virtuosity to treat the same theme again and again—innocence and despair with no belief in religion, no faith in politics, no trust in human nature. What can Anouilh do? Paint excess over excess, and excess of excess? The farce goes on, wilder and wilder, but with no fundamental change.

So we are at a standstill. We are still very rich, and I have not mentioned Georges Neveux, Maurice Clavel, Thierry Maulnier, Marcel Aymé and Puget. Any nation would be proud of so many playwrights. And yet . . . A philosopher and playwright, Gabriel Marcel, wrote in October, 1953, under the title "We are short of authors":

. . . It would be interesting to ask ourselves the reason why some of our best playwrights give the impression that they are

out of breath. The word "weariness" is on my pen and this weariness is due to what I shall call over-expression, a phenomenon that we can compare to the over-exposure of a photograph. Anouilh, Salacrou and perhaps also Sartre (though his case is rather different) have carried too far the impression of a kind of haunting and a sort of breaking has occurred, like the breaking of an aneurism. It seems evident in *Dieu le Savait* and in *Valse des Toreadors*. And they don't know in which direction they can set out again.

Salacrou has often tried to explain this uneasiness in the French theatre of to-day. He has said that there is a divorce between public and writers; that a writer can begin to write in the expectation of being understood by the public, but that he cannot go on writing if he is too plainly aware that he will not be.

There are ideological reasons for this state of affairs. France is very divided—this is a sequel to the war, and the theatre's public reflects this division. There are also commercial reasons. The cost of producing a new play is thirty times more than it was before the last war, but the price of a seat is only fifteen times more. Thus the director needs the kind of success which would fill a big theatre, or he must produce plays with only four or five actors and one set in a little theatre. In the last century the theatre had a public which could afford to pay a good price for seats. Nowadays everyone is half ruined by two wars and inflation, and this has happened at a time when, with artificial means of reproduction, the arts can reach many more people than ever before. If the playwright wants to spread his message or, more simply, to have a valuable partner in the public, he must try to reach the "popular" class. But this class has not been in our theatres for many years. To reach them you must have very low prices, and this means very big modern theatre buildings. And even then you have to find the right repertory—plays with enough inspiration, enough general value, to reach an extensive public. Our playwrights lack this general inspiration, and the directors go back to the classical repertory of all nations—the Spanish golden century, our seventeenth and eighteenth century writers, mostly Molière and Corneille, and the German classics and romantics. They put aside the modern repertory because it treats either of petty subjects, or without style of big subjects. French writers are still under the naturalistic influence of the last century and cannot find the style necessary to bring together a big audience and to operate the great mystery of the alchemy of the theatre. For though every spectator comes to the theatre as an individual being, he must be drawn by the effect of the play into a collective being, the audience.

There is the same problem, with a little difference, in the provincial towns in France. Theatrical life in the country has been quite

dead because of over-centralisation in Paris. But there are excellent troupes touring the provincial towns and bringing to them the big successes of the *théâtre du boulevard*, and even in some cases good plays with literary qualities. In addition you will now find, under the supervision and with the support of the government, the *centres dramatiques*, repertory theatres which do excellent work. They have their own troupe of young actors, their own *animateur*, and they stay in one part of the country, visiting the smaller towns and big villages. Jean Dasté, son-in-law of Copeau, works at St. Etienne, Michel St. Denis in Strasbourg, Hubert Gignoux in Rennes, and Sarazin in Toulouse. But there, as before, the repertory is not modern: most of it consists of classical plays that will interest the popular public. And this is not all. You will find in France an increasing tendency to get out of the stuffy little theatres and play in the open air where there is a chance of bringing together many more people, and without that separation between boxes, stalls and balcony. Everybody is together in the pit and all are more united, elbow against elbow, under the same big sky. The Festival of Avignon, the first and greatest, with Jean Vilar; the Festival of Strasbourg with Jean Vilar and Michel St. Denis; the Festival of Nîmes with Jean Renoir and Hermantier; the nights of Bourgogne; the Festivals of Angers, of Arras, of Sarlat; these are occasions for many *animateurs*, for many young actors to distinguish themselves. I think that this outbreak of festivals is something important in our theatre.

But here again, there is no outlet for the modern writers; no market; again our *animateurs* produce the classics—Oresteia of Aeschylus, Calderon, Shakespeare, Kleist and Schiller, Corneille, Molière, Beaumarchais. So I still say we are uneasy because we have not got the proper theatre buildings for our time, and our writers are still writing for the public of the old theatre and not for the public tired of stuffy theatres and stuffy plays.

All this may seem pessimistic, but I am not absolutely so because the world of the theatre is still intellectually very much alive in France. Many of the little theatres in Paris act as the laboratory of the modern French theatre. Young writers are produced either in very, very small theatres, *théâtres de poche* (*la Huchette*, *l'Humour*, etc.) or even in cabarets. I don't speak of the strip-tease or burlesque cabarets for foreigners, only too well known outside France, but of the cabarets of *chansonniers*. The *chansonniers* are a little out of mood; they can no longer sing their criticisms of politics because we are not in a mood to laugh at our divisions and at our politics after too many wars. Some of these little theatres and cabarets offer chances to shows by young writers. The influence of *La Rose Rouge*, *La Tomate*, *l'Ecluse*, *les Noctambules*, of the theatre of the *Quartier Latin*, must be noted. Many young producers

go there—Grenier, Hussenot, G. Vitaly, Michel de Ré—and it was in such little theatres that we saw the first works of writers like Pichette, Vauthier, Jonesco, Beckett, Tardieu, Adamow and others.

But the reign of the small theatre, though good for a short time, has inconveniences. It is the theatre of the minority, the theatre of revolt—revolt against everything, against the ordinary form of theatre, the ordinary form of language. It is the theatre of the abnormal; indeed, it calls itself the "anti-theatre". Now the problem for a playwright is to make an individual being melt into a collective being—the public or audience. What else, then, but "anti-theatre" can we call that which works on opposite lines? These plays try to convince you that all communication between human beings is impossible, that you are alone on this earth enclosed in your own loneliness. Strindberg began it, but he limited his study to the institution of marriage. Jonesco, Adamow and Beckett go much further. Theirs is the theatre of despair at the emptiness of our lives. Surely it is a paradox to bring people together to show them that they are alone, and yet I think

that maybe this is one form of the theatre of the future. With television every spectator will be alone; Paul Gilson has already spoken of the *rendezvous des solitaires*.

How shall I sum up my remarks about the French theatre to-day? From the outside it seems very much alive, rich in great plays and good writers, but nevertheless it is an uneasy world. The writers are out of step with their public for ideological and commercial reasons; the public itself is changing dramatically. We need mass theatre in mass civilisation. We have not got the proper buildings for this, so we seek our way into the open air. We have not got the authors for this mass theatre, but we believe we shall find them later on, for it is not at the time of political revolution that you find a revolution in playwriting. The great French Revolution did not bring forth good playwriting. That came later. It will come in France because the theatre is leading an intensely intellectual life in the small theatre-laboratories. As our young playwrights finish their schooling in them we shall find the men of the modern French theatre. We await them with hope and patience.

THEATRICAL HERITAGE

By WILLIAM KENDALL

THE International Conference on Theatre History last July deserves the attention of all who are interested in the future of the theatre. Twenty-one countries, including Soviet Russia and Japan, sent about sixty delegates and observers, and the discussions lasted a week. It may be thought strange that this vigorous interest in the past of the theatre should come at a time when its future seems so uncertain. But the contradiction is superficial: in all the arts our cultural heritage is being opened out by the scholar for all to see, and it is a heartening sign of the times that the theatre is included. It is also heartening that the relationship between research and the contemporary theatre was one of the Conference's major themes.

In the opinion of some this relationship is indirect, a climate of opinion rather than specific aids created by research; but it was nevertheless recognised that the growth of the historical sense within the theatre which has proceeded gradually during the last 150 years had gained considerable momentum in recent times. The scholar is now expected to give authentic information about the text, the building, the acting conventions and the social background of the drama of earlier times, not merely for the sake of the curious, but also to enable us to recapture the values of former times and gain from them inspiration for our present work. Distinction is rightly drawn

between these two separate, albeit inter-related, ends.

Revivals of earlier plays, as historical reconstructions based on scholarship and yet adjusted to the modern spirit, are to-day a prominent feature of the theatre. Attic drama is now being presented with much distinction in modern Greece. Roman plays are being revived in Italy and medieval drama in Austria, Czechoslovakia and most western European countries; the mystery plays in York and elsewhere are notable examples in this country. And scholarship is making a growing contribution to the many revivals of the more popular classics in each country. The role of research in this aspect of the theatre is more obvious, but none the less valuable on that account.

In addition, there is the increasing tendency on the part of theatre practitioners of all kinds, in the course of their contemporary work, to be constantly consulting the historical accounts and archives—if only to find out what to avoid in the future. One striking illustration is to be found in recent experiments in theatre design. In Germany, as part of the revolt against the baroque theatre, a number of modern theatres have been built in an antique form. In England we have seen the influence of the Elizabethan stage on the sets at Stratford and on the design of the proscenium at the Old Vic. America has gone to the extent of building a life-size replica of the Globe theatre.

In France, as is to be expected in a country with a strong historical sense, theatre research has had a considerable influence on theatre practice, as is manifest in the use of theatres themselves for lectures and exhibitions. The exhibition is usually a popular shop-window for theatre history, but some have themselves made history. This was the case with the first large international theatre exhibition organised in Vienna in 1892 by the theatre scholar, Karl Glassy, which powerfully affected scholars and practitioners alike. And in the same city the University of Vienna, in collaboration with the Austrian National Library, is currently organising a similar exhibition on an even more ambitious scale.

Exhibitions are, however, only the outward and intermittent sign of the work being continuously carried out all over the world by our libraries and museums, and the Conference devoted a full session to a review of these sources and collections. Compared with research in other fields, theatre research is a newcomer and its materials are scattered widely. There is therefore a tremendous task ahead in locating and assembling them. Since the field is world-wide, there is an acute need for an international agency both to keep research workers in touch with the theatrical experiences of other countries and to co-ordinate their work. An equally urgent task is to limit the ravages being caused by ignorance and neglect to the records of the contemporary theatre. In this country, for example, only recently has a move been made by public authorities towards preserving theatres of historical importance. We have, moreover, the dubious distinction of possessing no national museum of the stature of the Musée de l'Opéra, despite such valuable collections as those housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. And yet modern techniques are continually opening out new possibilities. The film makes it no longer inevitable that the voices of the past should be forever silent, and at the Conference there was a plea for the use of this medium to record actual play performances. The method was illustrated by films sent from Russia showing the Central Soviet Army Theatre (whose distinguished director attended the Conference) in a play by Lope de Vega.

Perhaps the most unequivocal expression of the importance of theatre research is to be found in the university departments devoted to this study. Here, with the honourable exception of the University of Bristol, the study of the theatre has not yet been accorded the dignity of university discipline. Represented at the Conference, however, were the Theatre Institute of the University of Vienna, the Universities of Helsinki and of Mainz, and the Department of Graduate Studies in the History of the Theatre at Yale University. In America the relation between the universities and the practical theatre is particularly close, for the

concentration of the professional theatre on Broadway leaves the greater part of the organisation of drama elsewhere in the hands of the universities. How the resulting position compares with that over here was described by an American delegate: Elia Kazan received his training from Professor Baker at Yale, whereas Sir Laurence Olivier got his from Elsie Fogerty.

Laggard as we may be in some respects, Britain can boast a Society for Theatre Research which is already several years old and whose publications have won international recognition. It was because this Society felt that the time was ripe for furthering international contacts that the Conference came into being, and its success confirmed their views. At the end of its deliberations the Conference set up, with acclaim, the International Federation for Theatre Research.

Provisionally, the new international organisation consists of a policy committee of one representative from each of the countries taking part in the Conference, and it is hoped that others with important and distinct theatre traditions, such as India, China, and the South American countries, will attend a World Conference in 1957. Within a year, an Executive Committee elected at the Conference will report to the policy committee on the constitution and establishment of the Federation. Responsibility therefore lies immediately with this Executive Committee and it is gratifying that England is providing the chairman, an acknowledgement of its initiative in calling the Conference. The staff of the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo* in Rome has been generously placed at the disposal of the new body to serve as a secretariat. Other countries on the Executive Committee are France, a representative of the German-speaking peoples, Sweden (representing the small nations generally), Czechoslovakia (also representing Poland), Russia and America.

The role of the International Federation has yet to be precisely defined, but the collection and exchange alone of materials and information in accessible forms provides immediate tasks. The section of the International Federation of Library Associations recently set up to deal with the theatrical arts was the only body concerned in this field (apart from the wider-flung work of UNESCO), and this section has representation on the Executive Committee. Illustrative of the importance of the work which the Federation will have before it is the project raised by America at the Conference: that the essential archives in each country should be microfilmed as part of an international scheme to make them available wherever they may be needed.

Whatever the future of such projects, however, the major step of instituting an International Federation has been taken and it is for this primarily that the first International Conference in 1955 will be remembered.

THEATRE BOOKSHELF

Theatre of Japan

The Kabuki Theatre of Japan, by A. C. Scott. Allen & Unwin. 30s.

This is the second book on the Japanese Stage to appear in English during the last six months; and, like Mr. Faubion Bowers' volume (reviewed in the Summer issue of DRAMA), it is addressed not only to the specialist but also to the general reader. From both points of view, Mr. A. C. Scott's work has one obvious disadvantage. The Japanese are excellent photographers, and many admirable photographs of theatrical scenes and personages are already in existence. Yet Mr. Scott uses very few photographs, and his text is for the most part illustrated with sketches by his own hand, which, although neat and at times expressive, give little impression of those superb pictorial effects, those noble poses and splendid groupings, so characteristic of the Kabuki Theatre. His prose-style, on the other hand, is very much more eloquent. Mr. Scott is an Englishman who, having served with the British Council in China, became enamoured of the Oriental stage and has since spent some years in Japan, studying the drama of the Kabuki-za under the auspices of the International Theatre Institute. Particularly valuable is his first chapter, entitled "A Background to Appreciation," in which he describes the origins of Kabuki and gives an account of the social conditions that produced its finest flowering. For it flourished during the Tokugawa period when the *Samurai*, or feudal warrior, deprived of his occupation by long years of peace, was threatened with submergence by the rise of the *chonin*, the class of merchants, artisans and craftsmen, who, cut off from the traditional culture of the feudal aristocracy, were busy creating an independent culture, which incorporated, nevertheless, some of the ideals of the aristocratic world. Thus, Kabuki, although designed to amuse the commoner, took many of its themes from the chivalric past. But its inspiration was essentially popular; and the Kabuki dramatist was advised to write as if he were drawing a picture, not writing in the learned Chinese script, so that his story might be understood by the least sophisticated type of audience.

Mr. Scott, however, does not confine his attention to the Kabuki stage, with its gifted actors of flesh and blood. He devotes a delightful chapter to the Ningyo Shibai, or Doll Theatre, which seems to have come into being at the beginning of the seventeenth century and still prospers as the Bunraku-za in the modern commercial city of Osaka. Here he has been privileged to meet and talk with a famous doll-handler, named Yoshida Bungoro,

now eighty-seven years old, who specialises in feminine parts. To Bungoro, as to all the people of this theatre, the puppets he manages are living creatures; and his "favourite doll never leaves his side; sleeping or waking she is always with him." No one who has visited the Bunraku-za will find this attitude at all far-fetched. The Japanese puppet in expert hands, drinking tea, drawing its sword, opening its fan or playing chess, has an air of concentrated dramatic vitality that would put to shame the performance of many well-known living English actors.

PETER QUENNELL

A Search for the Elemental

In Search of Theater, by Eric Bentley. Dobson. 35s.

Professor Bentley's book is a quest, and the picaresque richness of his progress through the post-war dramas of America and a host of European countries fortifies and deepens his self-debate on the fundamental dramatic antithesis which he terms Bedrock versus Superstructure. Eric Bentley is perhaps our only great modern critic: he penetrates to the heart of drama and discusses what is true and false in modern work for and on the stage. Always a man of the theatre, he never commits the *trahison des profs*, never allows literary quality to be the ruling test of dramatic worth. His odyssey carries faint overtones of the *Divina Commedia*: the waste land of Broadway is undoubtedly Hell; one suspects that O'Neill and Shakespeare-done-wrong are his Purgatory. To O'Neill he is scrupulously fair and devastatingly just, and his "Doing Shakespeare Wrong" is prescribable reading for our producers, who lie in their souls as they traduce the name of Granville-Barker. Brecht and Pirandello furnish Bentley's Paradise, and the sections on these two writers, the most enduring European dramatists since Chekhov, are the finest things in the book.

Eric Bentley's work as an interpreter and translator of Brecht is well known; in this book he gives us, set in the panorama of modern European dramaturgy, to which even now the British Theatre turns only its cod-like commercial eye, an evocative analysis of Epic Theatre and of its practice by Brecht. When he comes to Pirandello he is almost always as right-headed as only Desmond MacCarthy and John Palmer have been in this country; I sometimes feel nevertheless that he expects to find Brechtian values and modes in the Pirandellian labyrinth. I think, too, that Professor Bentley accepts too readily the popular designation of Pirandello's vision as humanistic; though it is true that the Existentialists stem from him, I incline to

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find his work essentially religious, to see it as a pilgrimage in search of God and of the knowledge of God's will.

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FREDERICK MAY

All in a Life Time

Too Late to Lament, by Maurice Browne. Gollancz. 25s. **Peggy Ashcroft**, by Eric Keown. Rockliff. 12s. 6d. **Charley's Aunt's Father**, by Jevan Brandon-Thomas. Douglas Saunders with MacGibbon & Kee. 18s.

Maurice Browne's autobiography, published after death, is a strange testament: the record of a man of the theatre, talented and neurotic, who seems to have been resolved in this book to show himself in the fierce light that blackens every blot. A pity because he had given a lot to the theatre, could have given more, and had made devoted friends. (He also lost friends.) The blurb says that his story "breathes an astonishing radiance and contentment." The phrase is disputable. Still, we do know that Browne, at his meridian, could be a prodigious worker for the stage he loved. The Chicago Little Theatre, which he ran with Ellen Van Volkenburg, offers in America his surest passport to the theatrical records. In Britain he is remembered as the sponsor of *Journey's End*; it is curious that in this careful and elaborate book the name of R. C. Sherriff is consistently misprinted.

Browne had a very difficult childhood. When he was thirteen his brilliant father committed suicide. Throughout his life he was a haunted man. Happily he was a poet; he had sound theatrical taste; and his first marriage—to Ellen Van Volkenburg—brought the joy of the Chicago adventure. Later came tangled love affairs, the fabulous *Journey's End* (on his return to England), and a period as an impresario that brought its excitements—an International Season with Cochran, for example—though his influence on the stage of the 'thirties has been, I think, exaggerated. An erratic man, tragic, oddly likeable: epithets that serve also for his book—not a comfortable one but worth reading, in spite of later mistiness, for its consciously candid self-study and, now and then, for some portraits, stereoscopically sharp, of people in and out of the theatre.

On page 323 occurs the name of the young Peggy Ashcroft, Desdemona in Mr. Browne's Savoy *Othello* (with Paul Robeson and Sybil

Thorndike) during 1930. Eric Keown of *Punch*, one of our wisest and wittiest critics, has treated Miss Ashcroft's life with the sympathy and civilised appreciation so exciting a record deserved. He has the urbanity and repose that some of his juniors who try too hard might well study. The book shows Miss Ashcroft's range, her ability to play Hedda, Cleopatra, Beatrice, and Rattigan's Hester, and always to reveal the heart of the argument, the heart of the woman, with a truth unforced and a technique extraordinary in its finesse. The book's picture gallery (nearly seventy pictures, Mander and Mitchenson choices, of course) is the true complement to Mr. Keown's prose. And who would have dreamed of meeting Miss Ashcroft and Miss Wynyard in gym tunics as Cassius and Brutus?

Brandon Thomas, born in 1848, died just before the first world war (Maurice Browne was in Chicago and Peggy Ashcroft was a girl of six). He was much more than the author of *Charley's Aunt*: he was a good actor, husband, father, and friend. Jevan Brandon-Thomas's book, not just a filial tribute, is a light on the theatre of its time and on such a player as the difficult Penley. As for the *Aunt*, here is a telegram from a Berlin manager: "Of laughing there was multitude the theatre was full to overflowsings."

J. C. TREWIN

The Legal Aspect

Show Business and the Law, by E. R. Hardy Ivamy. Stevens. 25s.

From the legal point of view it can be well imagined that there is no more tricky business than "Show Business". The emotionalism and the "happy-go-luckiness" which are the characteristics not only of the artist, but also of the manager, and without which "Show Business" would have little magic, do not tend to make for clarity of contracts. Even when the written contract exists there is so much in the custom of the profession that is unwritten, that it is no wonder that the keenest brains in the Law Courts sometimes lose their way in the labyrinths. In the last twenty years there has been a solid attempt by the newly-formed Trade Unions on the one side, and the Employers' Associations on the other, to get down to common-sense written contracts embracing every possibility. Mr. Hardy Ivamy has performed a valuable service by collecting and collating all the available information and his book is, as he claims, a comprehensive work written in language which it is easy for the layman to understand. It covers the range of theatre, film, television, copyright, censorship, third party risks and many other matters. Here is information alike for young actors wanting to set up a repertory in a village hall and for the film magnate desiring to register his company as a British concern—and indeed pointing out in the latter case the ruses which the Law will not tolerate.

One unfortunate error occurs in the para-

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<i>Jack Pottlewell</i>	The Remarkable Mr.
Diary of a Nobody	Pennypacker
<i>Adapted by Basil Dean and</i>	<i>Liam O'Brien</i>
<i>Richard Black from the original</i>	Sailor Beware
<i>by George and Weedon Grossmith</i>	<i>Philip King & Falkland Cary</i>
Hippo Dancing	Serious Charge
<i>Adapted by Robert Morley from</i>	<i>Philip King</i>
<i>the French by Andre Roussin</i>	Simon and Laura
The Jolly Fiddler	<i>Alan Melville</i>
<i>Rex Frost</i>	The Sleeping Prince
The Lark	<i>Terence Rattigan</i>
<i>Adapted by Christopher Fry from</i>	Spider's Web
<i>the French "L'Alouette" by Jean</i>	<i>Agatha Christie</i>
<i>Anouilh</i>	Time Remembered
The Manor of Northstead	<i>Adapted by Patricia Moyes from</i>
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graph on non-profit distributing bodies. It is stated that the Arts Council is made responsible for advising the Commissioners of Customs and Excise in the matter of Entertainments Tax Exemption. This is, of course, not the case. There is no mention of the Arts Council in the 1946 Finance Act which sets out the conditions for exemption. There is nothing in the Charter of the Arts Council which suggests that they should advise the Commissioners. Though it is common knowledge that the Commissioners do occasionally ask the Arts Council for advice, both the asking and the giving are purely voluntary actions on the part of the two bodies concerned.

CHARLES LANDSTONE

Popular and Learned

The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, by M. C. Bradbrook. Chatto & Windus. 18s. **A History of English Drama 1660-1900**, Volume IV, by Allardyce Nicoll. C.U.P. 55s.

There were more comedies than tragedies on the Elizabethan stage but there are fewer books about them. To explain a joke is to kill it. The comic muse delights in whisking away the academic chair at the critical moment. It puns a protest to Duke Thesis, "all for your D.Litt. we are not here." In the margin of imagination it scribbles scandalous sketches of Miss Bradbrook sending her Girton girls into Rabelaisian roars over the juicier jests in Marston.

The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy surveys a wide range of comic writers from Lyly to Fletcher, and illustrates the thesis that only Shakespeare could unite the popular and learned traditions of entertainment. What is wanted is a critical Shakespeare to unite the learned tradition of scholarship with the popular practice of play-going. Miss Bradbrook is lucid, knowledgeable and interesting; but somehow the laughter of a theatrical folk does not echo through her pages.

Allardyce Nicoll's *History of English Drama 1660-1900* is a work comparable to E. K. Chambers' history of the medieval and Elizabethan stage. The two volumes dealing with early nineteenth-century drama, first published twenty-five years ago, have now been revised and rolled into one. This period also reveals a disastrous cleavage between the popular and the learned, the vulgar vitality of crude melodrama and farce and the theatrical lifelessness of the plays the poets tried to write. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Browning, Tennyson are the lost tribe of the English drama. Professor Nicoll has hardly a good word to say of any of them. From what I have seen of Byron, Keats and Browning on the stage, this seems too severe. Might not the B.B.C. do something to help us reassess this strangely stillborn drama?

It was, as Professor Nicoll says, the melodrama that inherited the vital force of

Elizabethan days. And, as Miss Bradbrook says, aptly quoting T. S. Eliot: "It is not lack of character or lack of action and suspense, or imperfect realisation of character, or lack of anything that is called 'theatre' that makes early nineteenth-century drama so lifeless: it is primarily that their rhythm of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except a poetry reciter."

The integration of vision and vitality, culture and common touch, is in fact, a perennial problem for the playwright, as real for us as it was for the earlier Elizabethans and Victorians.

ROY WALKER

Ancient and Modern

The Political Plays of Euripides, by Gunther Zuntz. Manchester University Press. 18s. **A Match for the Devil**, by Norman Nicholson. Faber. 10s. 6d. **Mary Stuart**, by Joseph Chiari. O.U.P. 7s. 6d. **A Comedy and Two Proverbs**, by A. de Musset, trans. George Graveley. Carmel. 6s.

Dr. Zuntz's Euripidean study (no text or translation) is addressed primarily to classical specialists; its value in the dramatic workshop, however, will be by no means small if it leads to the rediscovery and fresh understanding of two generally neglected works. *The Suppliant Women* and *The Children of Heracles* will surprise and excite those who approach them under Dr. Zuntz's guidance, both by their general unlikeness to the classic type of tragedy and by their vital relevance to our own and to all time. They are styled "political plays" in the sense that they offer, instead of the more primitive themes of personal, though universal, fate, a view of man living in a political world, learning the obligations of morality rather than of religion, of peace rather than of war. "Euripides's conception of a rationally ordered fellowship of all men, based upon a universal law and sustained by the devotion of all its members, has ever since been the dream of the best minds; to our world it has become the question of life and death."

New translation and discerning production of these plays might well enlarge for us our view of the range of Greek, especially of Euripidean, drama.

A distinguished critic was recently heard to charge a French dramatist with the impropriety of "mixing up religion and sex." No such preposterous objection inhibited Mr. Norman Nicholson in the shaping of *A Match for the Devil*. Some "consumers" of religious drama may find the literal interpretation of the first three chapters of Hosea a little off their beat; and all, I imagine, will have to do some hard thinking to get this curious tale into proper perspective. Propriety apart, the logic of the play is open to criticism, if it asks us to apply a moral judgment to an anthropological curiosity (the cult of religious prostitution) which surely lies outside our moral focus. However, Mr. Nicholson gives of his best in

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the salty dialogue and the tang of the countyside of Jezreel, Cumberland, and nothing but good can come of an acquaintance with his homely honest baker named Hosea.

Mr. Joseph Chiari's verse play on Mary of Scotland is based on the assumption that the outlines of her story are well known to the audience. This method enables him to shape his scenes with a classic economy, and though it may leave some details of his interpretation obscure, it is amply justified by the power and eloquence of the play as a whole, especially in the final phases of the tragedy. The parts of Mary and Elizabeth are richly illuminated against a background of more shadowy male characters, but everywhere there is fineactable dialogue in a dignified but flexible verse.

For small stages where the delicate art of miniature-painting can find effective expression, the three short plays of De Musset in Mr. Graveley's translation would provide excellent material; but they will be deathtraps for the heavy-footed and the ham-fisted.

E. F. WATLING

Television Scripts

Writing for Television, by Sir Basil Bartlett. Allen & Unwin. 9s. 6d. **Writing for Television**, by Arthur Swinson. A. & C. Black. 16s.

Here are two books with the same title, each written by a member of the BBC's Television staff, each aiming to instruct the professional writer in the craft of writing television programmes. The contents of the books overlap to some extent, but for the most part they are complementary.

Sir Basil Bartlett, the former Script Supervisor of the Television Drama department, is mainly concerned with the writing of plays. The BBC alone requires more than one hundred television plays each year, and recently it has done its best to encourage and to train authors to write original work for the medium. This hungry demand for drama has been greatly intensified by the coming of commercial television. The talented playwright is faced by a rapidly expanding market for his wares.

Sir Basil deals, in very elementary terms, with the basic requirements of television, and assures the author of the welcome that awaits him at Television Centre. His book is scarcely detailed enough to be of much practical value. Its most valuable part consists of excerpts from successful television productions, and these include some pages from Nigel Kneale's brilliant script for 1984.

Arthur Swinson's book is a much more craftsmanlike job. It is longer (and more expensive), and the author takes immense pains to describe the exact technique of planning, writing, and producing scripts. Mr. Swinson is a television writer of considerable experience and enthusiasm and he has a gift for imparting knowledge. Drama is not his main concern: he gives it only six pages, as

compared with the fifty-six pages that he devotes to an analysis of the various types of documentary programmes. He writes with an eager sense of mission. Television, Mr. Swinson believes, should entertain, inform, and instruct its vast audience; it should make people think, arouse discussion, and open a window upon all possible aspects of our contemporary world. The methods by which it can best achieve these purposes are illustrated by examples from documentary scripts by the author and his colleagues.

This book should certainly be read and studied by any would-be television author.

ERIC CROZIER

Long Plays

The Marvellous Story of Puss in Boots, by Nicholas Stuart Gray. O.U.P. 8s. 6d. (acting edition 4s.). **Ring Up the Curtain**. Heinemann. 16s. **Containing Marching Song**, by John Whiting; **No Escape**, by Rhys Davies; **The Facts of Life**, by Roger MacDougall, and **It's Never Too Late**, by Felicity Douglas. **The Conspiracy at "The Crayfish"**, by L. G. Baker. Deane. 5s. **Ladies at Sea**, by Stuart Ready. Deane. 5s. **Happy Memories**, by Gertrude Jennings. French. 4s. **The Offending Hand**, by R. F. Delderfield. Deane. 5s. **Over the Garden Fence**, by Elizabeth Addyman. English Theatre Guild. 5s. **Kind Cousin**, by Janet Allen. Deane. 5s. **The Come Back**, by Parnell Bradbury. Deane. 5s. **Mr. Mason**, by Jack Last. Deane. 5s. **The Farmer Wants a Wife**, by Patricia O'Connor. Carter. 4s. 6d. **The Golden Girls**, by Dymphna Cusack. Deane. 5s. **The Food of Love**, by Christopher Bond. Deane. 5s. **The Prince of Peace**, by V. D. Peareth. O.U.P. 2s. 6d. **He Came Unto His Own**, by Vera G. Cumberlege. O.U.P. 2s. 6d.

There must be many among us of advancing years who recall the delight with which we listened, when very young, to the old fairy tales and who regard as an affront the tawdry travesty of these stories presented in the modern pantomime. To such Mr. Gray's plays come as a real and refreshing joy. *The Marvellous Story of Puss in Boots* is described as a play for children, but like his other plays it has undoubtedly a much wider appeal. Those who saw the first performance in the West End last Christmas were indeed fortunate. Enchanting, bewitching, charming, were among the encomiums used by the critics, and they did not exaggerate. There are six scenes, none of them very difficult, and a cast of 7 male, 4 female, with supers *ad lib*.

Three of the plays in Messrs. Heinemann's volume have already been reviewed in "Plays in Performance" in previous issues of *DRAMA*. The fourth, *No Escape*, is Rhys Davies's first play and as such it holds great promise. First played at Eastbourne with Miss Flora Robson in the lead, this is a well-knit drama set in a farmhouse in the Welsh mountains. Characters are interesting and well-drawn and the

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suspense is admirably sustained. (3 m., 4 w., 1 set.)

Conspiracy at "The Grayfish" is a pleasant little comedy faintly in the Jacobs-Philpotts tradition. The plot is rather thin, depending as it does upon a series of misunderstandings regarding names—a well-worn device. Characterisation and dialogue are consistent. (6 m., 7 w., 1 set.)

Ladies at Sea is a typical play for women with T.W.G. and Girl Guides *en fête* and a mock treasure hunt to add to the fun. Shorn of its farcical element, there is material here for a good play of mystery and detection, but in the attempt to have everything, too much has been lost. Mr. Ready is a prolific playwright who can do much better than this. (10 w., 1 set.)

In two acts set in 1930 and an epilogue in 1950, *Happy Memories*, produced at the Northampton Repertory Theatre last April, is a moving little play in which three sisters, surviving in the epilogue, are the principal characters. It calls for sensitive production and some experienced acting. (3 m., 6 w., 1 set.)

As one expects from Mr. Delderfield, *The Offending Hand* is a workmanlike play with an interesting plot and no dull spots. It has something pertinent to say on the dangers inherent in the current methods of dealing with juvenile criminals and on petticoat influence as a contributory factor to their misdeeds. (4 m., 4 w., 1 set.)

Over the Garden Fence, which was successfully performed by the Arthur Brough Players at Folkestone in 1954, is full of human interest. It deals with the lives of three families in adjoining houses in a satellite town. The juvenile delinquent again figures prominently; his downfall, accelerated by an adoring mother, is ultimately arrested by his father who administers an old-fashioned remedy in face of his wife's threats. The play is well written and its drama is relieved with the right admixture of comedy. (5 m., 4 w., 3 scenes—1 set would suffice.)

Kind Cousin, first produced at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, is a gripping drama of obsession, in two acts. The play is well written and all the characters are convincingly drawn, providing excellent scope for acting. (2 m., 5 w., 1 set.)

More farce than comedy, *The Come Back* contains a bright idea for a plot which includes several dabblers in the occult, to wit, a medium, a guide (named Minnie Hee-Haw) and a poltergeist—all very bogus. There are some amusing passages and the dialogue is often witty, but sometimes laboured. Generally speaking, the whole rollicking affair is shapeless and needs tidying up. (2 m., 5 w., 1 set.)

Mr. Mason, although cleverly devised, is a miserable sort of play which is more likely to appeal to the criminologist or student of the lower fauna than to the average playgoer. It is the picture of a tyrant, adulterer, embezzler

and blackmailer, a creature so unspeakably vile that one experiences satisfaction when he is marched off to pay the penalty for a murder which, although a murderer at heart, he did not in fact commit. The author undoubtedly has gifts which would have been seen to greater advantage if he had realised that in a play of this kind some relief is a necessity. (4 m., 3 w., 1 set.)

The Farmer Wants a Wife, an Irish comedy, was first produced by the Ulster Group Players in Belfast in March. It is a very pleasing little play with a delightful set of characters and well within the range of an amateur company with some experience. The excellent dialogue is written in straight English although there are Irish songs and a richly drawn old house-keeper (usually tipsy) who should be typically Irish. (5 m., 6 w., 1 set.)

The Golden Girls, a very finished piece of work, is by an Australian writer who has several plays to her credit. It was first produced by the Repertory Players at Kidderminster. This is not a play for those who require light entertainment, which the title might suggest, but for those who can face the more tragic aspects of life. The interesting and well-devised plot covers a period from 1898 to 1948. The only criticism which might be made of the construction is that the short scenes necessitate the lowering of the curtain ten times during the action. (5 m., 5 w., 1 set.)

First performed at the Playhouse, Newcastle, under its original title "The Sweetest Canticle," *The Food of Love* is set in the living room of the music master at a public school. Its theme is the realisation of an ideal after many years of discouragement and frustration. Although his experiences have set a term to the musician's life, he lives long enough to see the fulfilment of his dream and the play ends on a note of triumph. This is an interesting and well-written play. If it is the author's first, he is to be congratulated. (6 m., 3 w., 1 set.)

The Prince of Peace was written in response to a request for "a play containing the whole Gospel story of the Nativity in words that young children can understand." In this the author has succeeded admirably. Not only has it appealed to children but it has toured for two years to adult audiences. The script contains very full notes on staging, lighting, music and costumes. Large cast. Simple settings.

Described as a Morality play for Christmas and Epiphany, *He Came Unto His Own* is much more than a Nativity play. It places the coming of Christ in its full biblical setting beginning with the creation and the fall and showing the resulting rejection of Christ and the persecution of His saints. This imaginative treatment is very impressive and there is some hard hitting for those who have ears to hear. It is amazing how much the authoress has contrived to put into so few pages. Large cast, simple settings, notes.

A. H. WHARRIER

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HERBERT JENKINS

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NEWS

Theatre Week and Summer Schools—1955

The Theatre in Contemporary Life, theme of the 1955 Theatre Week, was worked out in a series of good discussions. Alfred Drake and Rosamund Gilder gave complementary pictures of the American theatre from the technical and critical angles, and Henri Lelarge's address on the French theatre (printed in this number) had an unmistakable authenticity. Norman Marshall's balanced treatment of our own theatrical situation—made more pertinent by his appointment as Drama Director for Associated-Rediffusion—was reinforced by an hour of informal "question-time" with Margaret Leighton and Ursula Jeans.

The standard of West End plays available proved disappointing: early September is the low-water mark of the London theatrical year. Only the Gielgud *King Lear* provided the kind of fare that Theatre Week members expect, and even this aroused mixed emotions.

Living together in a college gave the Week a particularly intimate atmosphere; numbers were smaller than usual but the atmosphere to which the Standing Conference came for their joint discussions with League members on the Amateur Theatre in Contemporary Life was a happy one.

On the final Saturday night the whole gathering saw the work of the B.D.L. Summer School at Southlands, another college nearby. A hard-working student body had managed in nine days to capture impressively the atmosphere of Tennessee Williams's *The Long Good-bye*. Scenes from a new play, *Turn Right at the Crossroads*, by Jurneman Winch, a B.D.L. playwriting student, which had been done in its entirety at the August school at Chichester, were given, and *Come Home, My Children*, a one-act play by Margaret Turner, completed the programme. The freedom and vitality of the performances bore witness to the quality of the training.

Theatre Week in 1956 will be at Leamington Spa, an excellent centre for Stratford, Coventry, Birmingham, and a number of Little Theatres, from May 18th to 26th. The Western Area Gala Final is on the last night of the Week. In 1957 it is hoped to return to Harrogate at the time of the York Festival.

"Hunter's Moon"

At Theatre Week, the runner-up in the League's Original Full-Length Play Festival was presented by the Ormesby (Yorkshire) New Theatre Group. JOHN ALLEN, leading the discussion, assessed it as follows:

Ruth Pennyman's *Hunter's Moon* is a play of ideas with a vengeance. Ideas start up from it like downland hares in the twilight. Sometimes they refuse to run, goggle at one stupidly; more often they pause a-tremble, bolt in all directions, dart to earth, or vanish disappointingly. Mrs. Pennyman, with disarming modesty and candour, admits that the hares have taken possession of her, constantly diverting her from her main theme.

This theme one took to be that of Faust. Her central character is a country parson who throughout his life has been subject to bouts of intellectual frenzy which tempt him to challenge the existing frontiers of knowledge and seek for that universal power and understanding which the myth suggests to be the right of the gods and forbidden to man. There are continual references in the play to Adam and Eve, Prometheus, Asclepius, and of course to Faust.

The originality of the play lies in the manner in which Mrs. Pennyman, with a kind of neo-Renaissance freedom of mind, challenges the myth. She seems to suggest that the devil, who is eternally tempting man to probe, question, and thrust into the intellectual unknown, is not the destructive figure of the myth, but the symbol of a biological urge which is the most creative aspect of man.

Unfortunately Mrs. Pennyman's prolific mind has led almost to the destruction of her play; for not only are there continual intellectual diversions of one kind or another, but the action itself is confused and unconvincing. Her Faustian parson, wrestling with his God and the devil, is so poor a theologian, as Frances Mackenzie astutely pointed out, that the audience watched the tussle from afar, intellectually interested when they understood what was afoot (and the present writer has had the benefit of a text), but rarely involved in the play's issue of death and life, falsehood and truth.

Yet there remains a curious paradox in Mrs. Pennyman's writing; for although the characters behave in what is for the most part an inexplicable manner, making love and committing suicide with an abandon that defies comprehension, they live in the most convincing manner. The dialogue is taut, full of character, and often stylish.

Unfortunately neither acting nor production made for intelligibility. This was particularly so in the case of the figure one took to be the devil. The text suggested a certain beneficence. The performance was sardonic and at moments mephistophelian. For me the real devil of the play was the parson's brother, pointedly, it seemed, called Nick, and written and played as an irresponsible seducer; but this was evidently not the author's intention.

The audience was divided in welcoming a play that pelted the mind with notions, good, bad and indifferent, and in condemning it for having numbed the intelligence with its ill-discipline and obscurity. But the Ayes, I think, were unanimous in hoping that Mrs. Pennyman would feel sufficiently encouraged to do slaughter among her hares and have a shot at writing the play many of us believe she has in her.

Lectures for young People

The original title of "lectures" has become inadequate for the programmes given by the League each year to young people. At the Theatre Royal, Newcastle-on-Tyne, nearly 5,000 of them received on September 29th and 30th "An Introduction to the Theatre". The first half was practical, on Stage Speech (by the Director) and Stage Movement (by Miss Oxenford with a group of children from the locality who had had one rehearsal with her). The second half was filled by Bernard Braden and the *Anniversary Waltz* company, who were in the theatre on tour, with excerpts to illustrate the playing and staging of comedy.

At Christmas, four afternoon programmes will again be given. The first, on Thursday, December 29th, is at the Fortune Theatre, where the young audience will see *Puss in Boots* by Nicholas Stuart Gray, and then be told by that most accomplished of children's playwrights something of how it is done. On December 30th Paul Rogers will show, at Wyndham's, the whole process of "Creating Falstaff", and on January 3rd staff and students of the London Academy of Dramatic Art illustrate "A Day in the Life of a Drama Student". Finally, on January 6th Bernard Braden and Barbara Kelly hope to invite the young people to the Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, for a programme similar to the one they gave at Newcastle.

Tickets will cost 7s. 6d. for the first afternoon and 2s. 6d. for each of the other three; season tickets for the four events are 12s. 6d., to be obtained from the Secretary, 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

Training Department

Mr. Bernard Braden will open the Junior Drama League on December 29th at 10 Fitzroy Square, where the young members will have a room with model sets and model theatres, costumes and costume charts and properties. Publishers have generously supplied suitable books and plays to start a J.D.L. Library. The Club's activities will be confined to the holidays and the programme for members only at Christmas includes a visit to a rehearsal of the professional company in *Puss in Boots* at the Fortune Theatre, with a talk from Nicholas Stuart Gray, the author. There are also to be talks on Pantomime and on touring Shakespeare in New Zealand. At a practical session

members will work out their own ideas on production and acting. These activities are all free to members; they can also attend, at a reduced fee, the Junior Drama Classes held for non-members.

The Training Department is also glad to report developments in new types of Courses which have been held this year.

First came the experiment of two Week-end Courses organised by the North Staffordshire Drama Association in close co-operation with the new University at Keele. This contact between the undergraduates of the University and members of the dramatic Societies in the Potteries is admirable, and resulted in very lively Courses. There are signs that other Courses on a similar pattern may develop.

Secondly the British Railways, London Midland Region, Dramatic Society, asked us to run a Course for them at B.D.L. Headquarters. This proved a delightful experience. We were glad that an affiliated society should have sought our help in this way and we hope that others will do so in the future.

Lastly, with the assistance of Miss Maisie Cobby, L.C.C. Drama Inspector, we held a Course on School Drama especially for Teachers. The new premises made it possible to run simultaneous classes for Teachers in both junior and senior schools.

The usual Autumn and Spring Week-end Courses will be held, with the addition, in February, of a Course for Playwrights.

Overseas Students' Reception

On October 27th the Overseas Committee of the League held, at 10 Fitzroy Square, a reception to welcome to Britain young people who have come from all over the world to study the theatre.

Among those present to greet the guests were Nicholas Hannen, Bernard Miles and Sam Wanamaker, in addition to representatives from the British Council, the International Theatre Institute and members of the Committee.

The students—some seventy-two in number covering twenty nationalities—came from both the Americas, Canada, Australasia, the African continent, Asia and, of course, Europe. All have commenced work this year with the leading London drama academies, and between them they represent well over half the total number of overseas students attending these schools.

Happy that this first venture met with success, the Committee plans from time to time to hold further receptions for overseas visitors.

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PLAYWRIGHTS' AWARDS

The Charles Henry Foyle Trust has for the last four years endeavoured to help playwrights to find recognition through the Repertory and Little Theatres by offering an award of £100 to the writer of the best play by a new dramatist presented by one of the selected list of theatres. This year's winner is Moray McLaren whose *Heather on Fire* was presented by the Perth Repertory Company. Charles Landstone was the judge.

The 1955-56 Competition is to be judged by Derek Salberg, of the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. MSS. should be sent by June 30th, 1956, to the Clerk of the Trust, Dale Road, Bournbrook, Birmingham, 29.

The Tavistock Repertory Company had 135 entries for its three-act play competition, which followed a one-act competition last year. The winner was R. J. Atkins, of Enfield, with *The Larceners*, which was presented by the Company at Canonbury Tower in October, produced by Guy Brenton. Henry Sherek, John Fernald and Marie Ney were the judges.

W. RIDING THEATRE MONTH

During the month commencing October 24th (United Nations Day) selected plays from other countries were performed in many places in the West Riding. The idea is based on the belief that as the audience fashions the drama, so the theatre reflects the life and experience of a nation more readily than any other art and it can, therefore, make a contribution to international understanding.

The Festival has found support in many places—in schools, youth clubs, evening institutes, colleges, universities and amateur societies, and well over a hundred groups took part. Contributions ranged from Evenings of Plays, Songs and Dances, such as at Batley, Castleford, Skipton, Sherburn and in the Don Valley, to productions of plays by Ibsen, Pirandello and Anouilh. A company from Ackworth, formed especially for the Festival, gave touring performances of *The Trojan Women*.

But the strength of the Festival does not lie in the excellence of particular events, but rather in the sum of all the contributory ones and in the goodwill that has gone into promoting them.

To give the Festival a form and completeness, certain "central" events have been arranged—a Day Conference at Leeds University on Saturday, October 22nd, and an Inaugural Service in Wakefield Cathedral on Sunday. The official opening at Ecclesfield took the form of a special evening of Youth Plays including *The Wanderings of Iris* which has been arranged from the Ancient Egyptian. Also in the central programme, the West Riding branch of the British Drama League are sponsoring a production of *The Vigil* by Ladislav Fodor. A performance of *Thunder Rock* by the York Settlement Players closed the Festival.

T. E. TYLER

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SUBJECT INDEX TO ARTICLES - 1955

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CRAIG, E. GORDON

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THEATRE ABROAD

- The Best of Both Worlds, by Stuart Burge (Berlin) Winter
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PUBLISHED BY THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, 9 FITZROY SQUARE, LONDON, W.1 and
PRINTED BY THOMAS KNIGHT & CO. LTD., THE CLOCK HOUSE PRESS,
HODDESDON HERTS.

